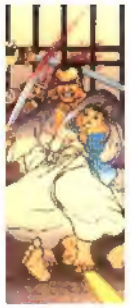
Two samurai match swords in a battle of honor; freshly planted shoots of rice bear the dying wish of a farm girl; a master gunsmith passes on his secrets to an unlikely recipient; a victim to the deadliest sword in Japan. Together, the ronin Lone Wolf and his little cub walk a path of vengeance, leaving a wake of blood and defiance wherever they roam. Combining elements of ultra-violence with a sense of deep honor and paternal love, *Lone Wolf and Cub* is in a league of its own among works of graphic fiction.

"Lone Wolf echoes traditional Japanese art in its restrained, realistic visuals and its unrestrained stories, which evoke classical samurai tales' blend of cultured aesthetics and sheer, ruthless bloody-mindedness."

— The Onion

Published for the first time in America in the Japanese format.



LONE WOLF AND CUB

KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

LONE WOLF AND CUB

DARK HORSE COMICS

Front cover illustration by FRANK MILLER *and* LYNN VARLEY

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VOLUME 5

BLACK WIND

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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DIGITAL CHAMELEON

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BLACK WIND

子連れ狼

By KAZUO KOIKE

& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

5

A NOTE TO READERS

Lone Wolf and Cub is famous for its carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

LONE WOLF AND CUB

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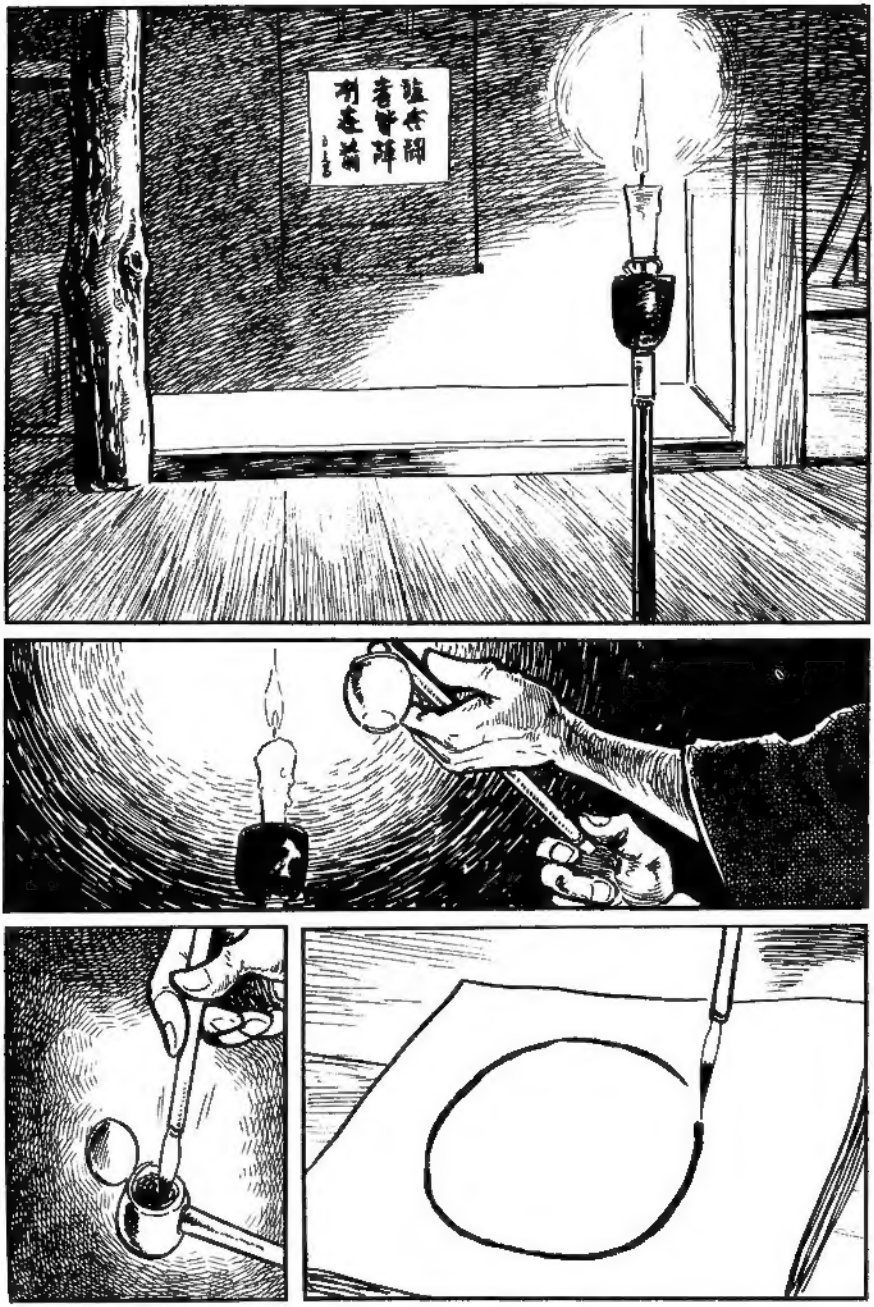
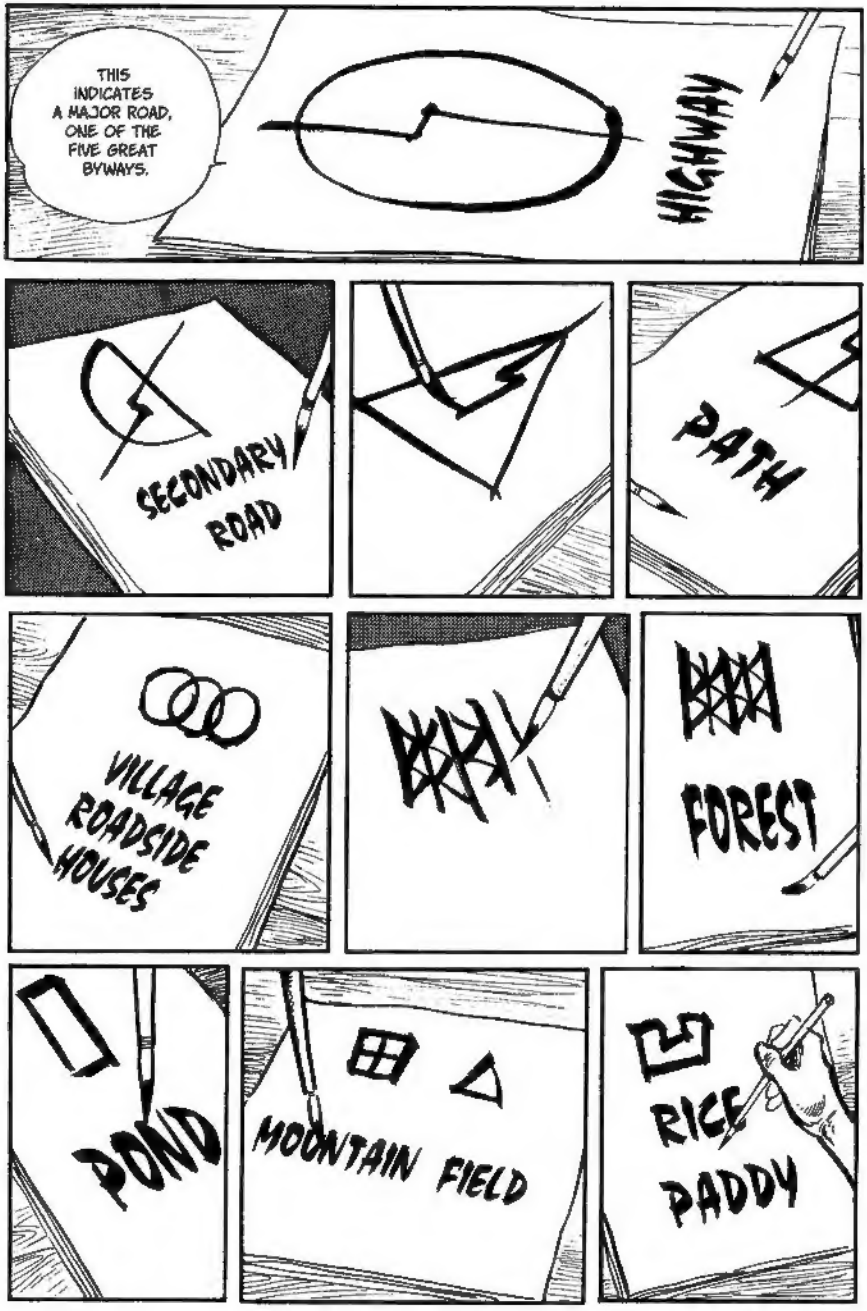
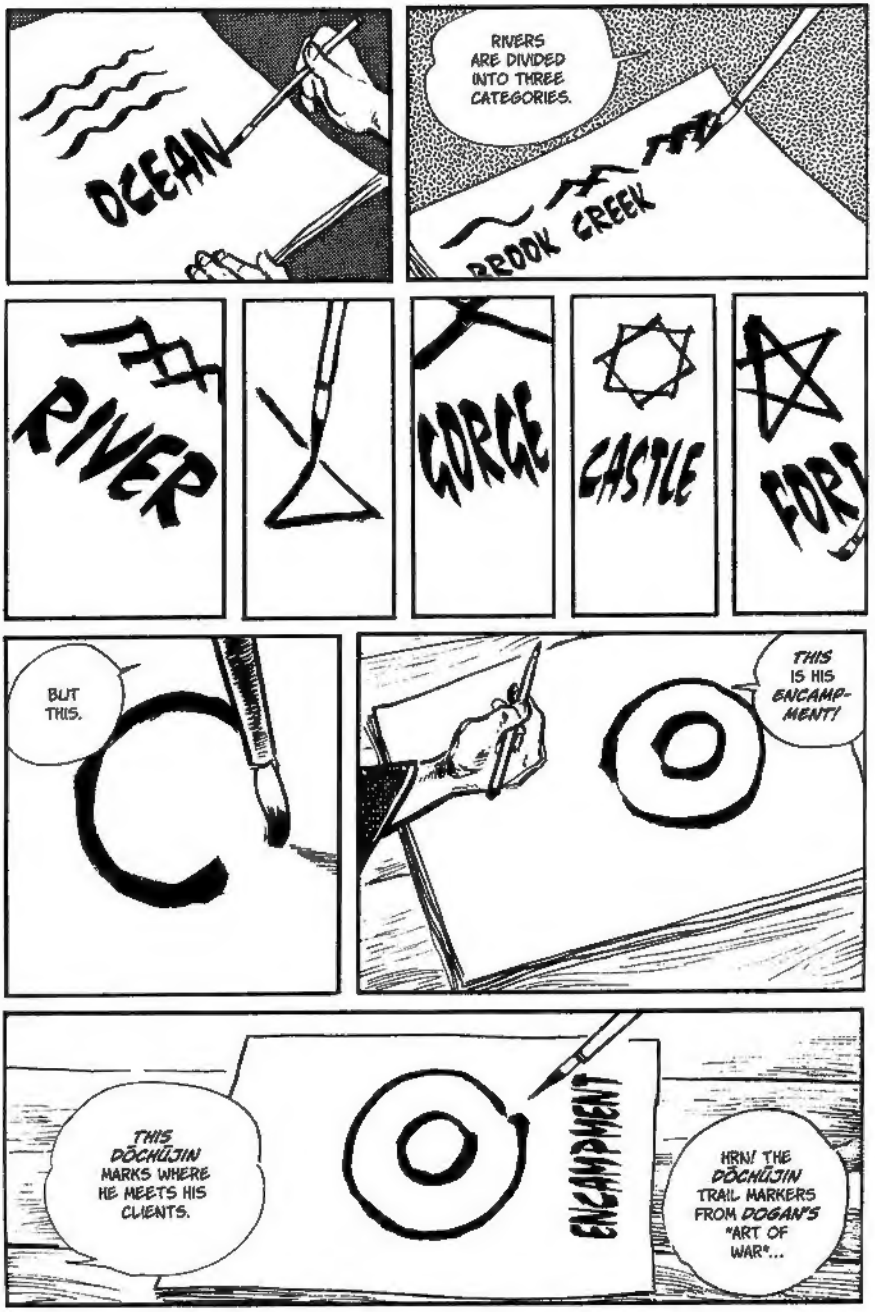
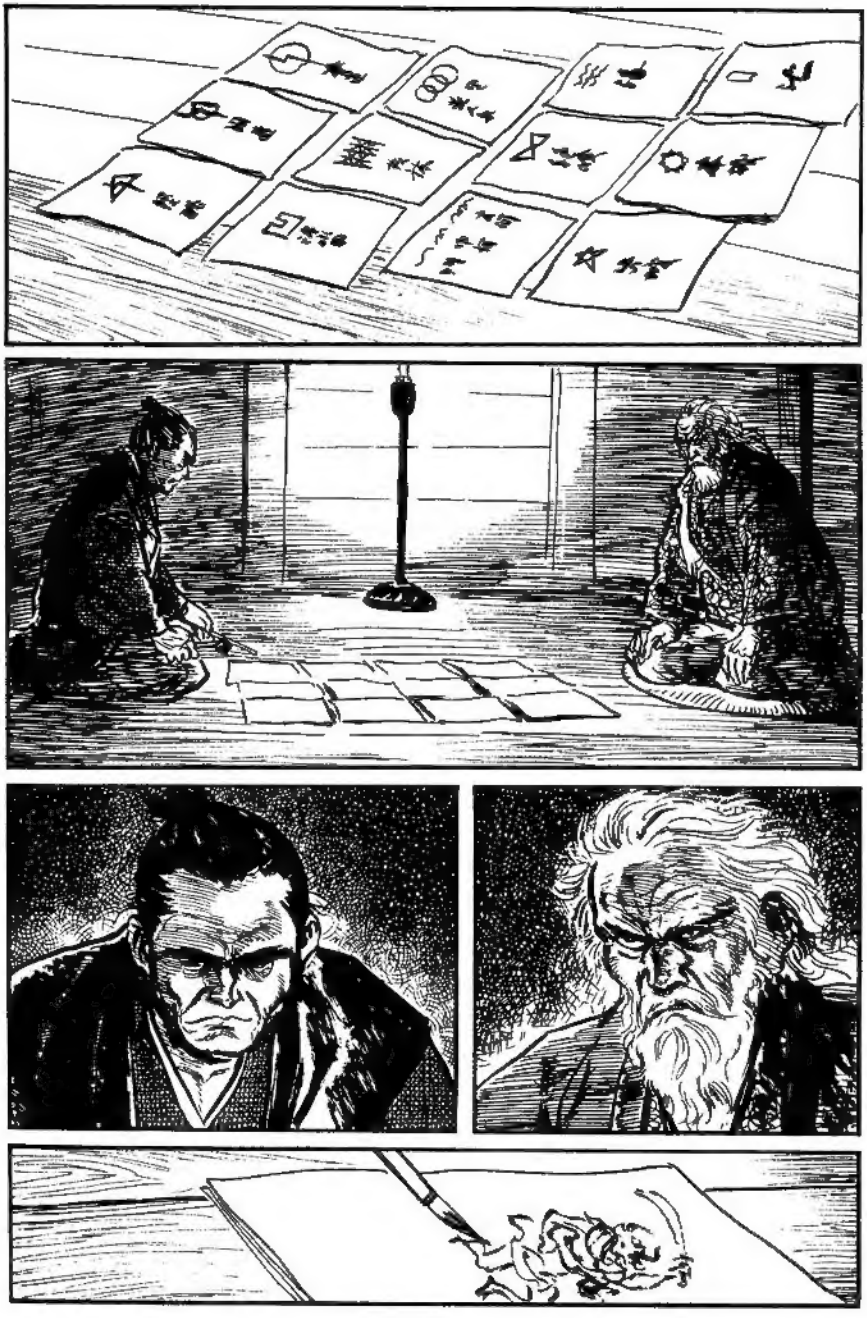
the twenty-fourth

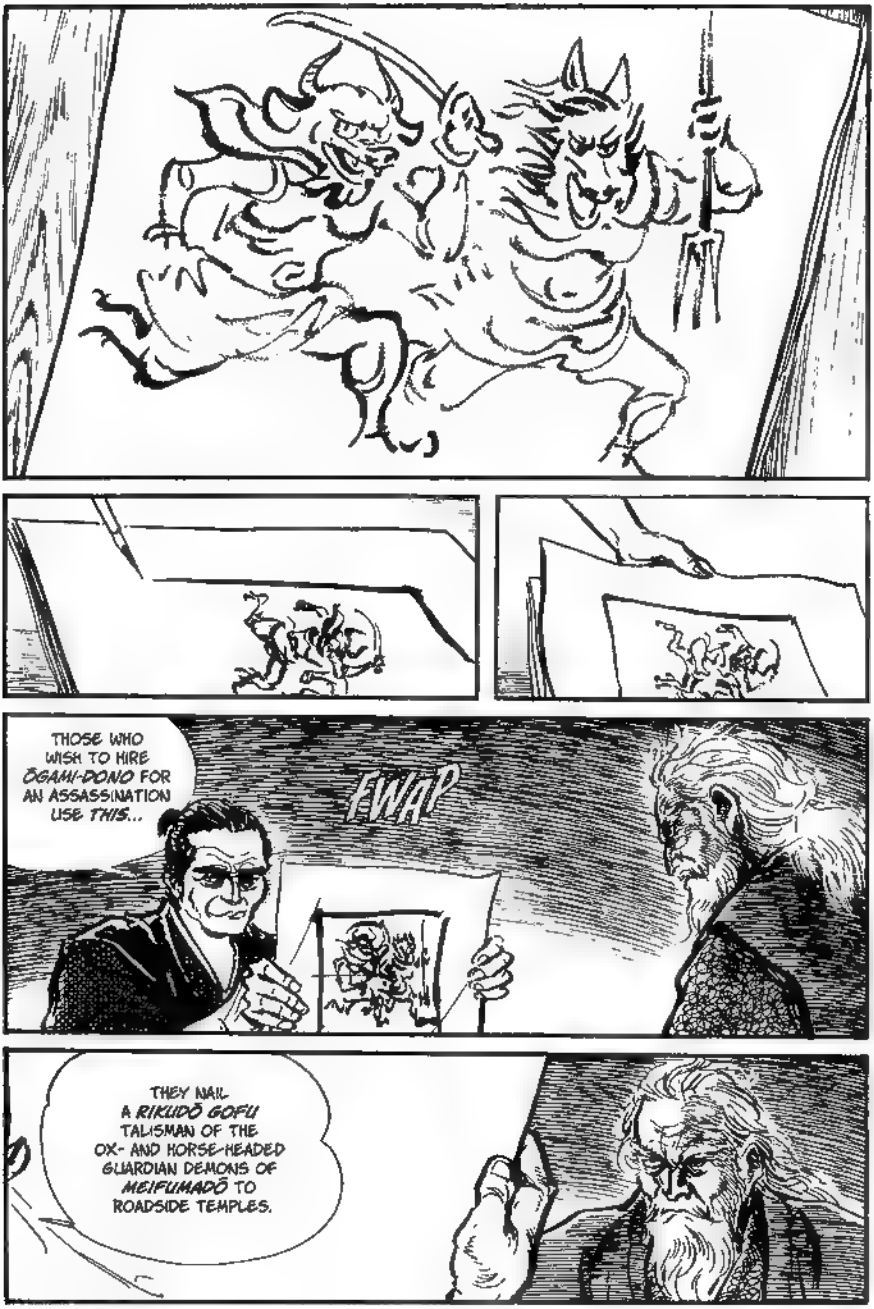
Trail Markers




THIS INDICATES A MAJOR ROAD, ONE OF THE FIVE GREAT BYWAYS.
HIGHWAY
SECONDARY ROAD
PATH
VILLAGE ROADSIDE HOUSES
FOREST
POND
MOUNTAIN FIELD
RICE PADDY


OCEAN
RIVERS ARE DIVIDED INTO THREE CATEGORIES.
BROOK
CREEK
RIVER
GORGE
CASTLE
FORD
BUT THIS.
THIS IS HIS ENCAMP-MENT!
THIS DŌCHŪJIN MARKS WHERE HE MEETS HIS CLIENTS.
ENCAMPMENT
HRM! THE DŌCHŪJIN TRAIL MARKERS FROM DOGAN'S "ART OF WAR"...

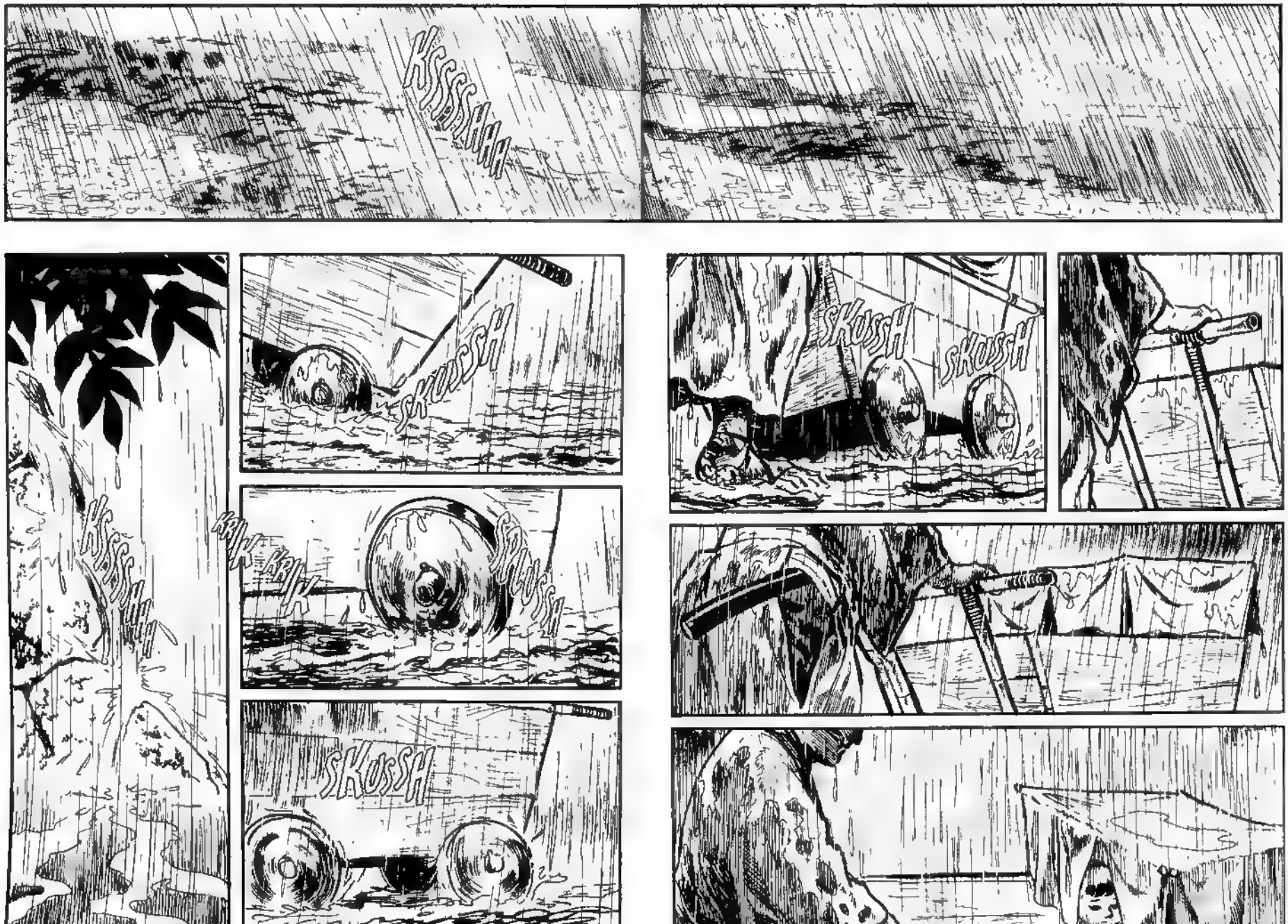



THOSE WHO WISH TO HIRE ŌGAMI-DONO FOR AN ASSASSINATION USE THIS...
FWAP
THEY NAIL A RIKUDŌ GOFU TALISMAN OF THE OX- AND HORSE-HEADED GUARDIAN DEMONS OF MEIFUMADŌ TO ROADSIDE TEMPLES.

IF ŌGAMI-DONO SEES THE TALISMAN, HE ALERTS THEM TO HIS PRESENCE.
THUS THE DŌCHŪJIN.
I SEE...
AND BY FOLLOWING THE DŌCHŪJIN TRAIL...
...THE CLIENT FINDS ITTŌ.
INDEED, MY LORD THERE MAY BE OTHER METHODS, BUT WE HAVE DOCUMENTED TWO CASES USING DŌCHŪJIN. IT SEEMS THE MOST RELIABLE.
BUT HOW DO CLIENTS LEARN OF THEM?
THIS IS SHEER SPECULATION, MY LORD. BUT MANY WHO WISH FOR THE DEATH OF AN ENEMY WILL POST CURSES AGAINST THEM AT A TEMPLE.
YOU HAVE HEARD OF USHI-NO-KOKU-MAIRI, VISITING A TEMPLE IN THE WITCHING HOUR? THERE ARE MANY SUCH STORIES. .
I SEE... IF HE PLACES DŌCHŪJIN WHERE PEOPLE POST THEIR TALISMANS. .
...SOME WILL BE SO DRIVEN BY HATRED TO FOLLOW THEM WHEREVER THEY LEAD. AS ŌGAMI HIMSELF CURSES OUR YAGYŪ CLAN! HOW LIKE HIM...

THE CART FOR HIS SON, DAIGORŌ-DONO. IT HAS THREE CONCEALED NAGAMAKI
WELL DONE! BUT I EXPECTED NO LESS OF ISHINE OZUNU, THE LEADER OF THE KUROKUWA NINJA
YET YAGYŪ-SAMA. WHY YOUR INTEREST IN ŌGAMI-DONO NOW?
I PROMISED TO SPARE HIS LIFE AS LONG AS HE STAYED OUT OF EDO, BUT THE SITUATION HAS CHANGED--AFTER TWO YEARS, OUR FEUD IS SUDDENLY UNDER INVESTIGATION!
AND BY HIGH SHOGUNATE OFFICIALS. MEN NOT EASILY MANIPULATED.
WE MUST CUT OFF TROUBLE AT THE ROOTS, BEFORE IT GROWS!

OZUNU! MOBILIZE THE KUROKUWA! HAVE YOUR MEN POST RIKUDO GOFU TALISMANS ON EVERY TEMPLE! FIND ŌGAMI ITTŌ!
BUT, YAGYŪ-SAMA....
...AS I SAID BEFORE, WE KUROKUWA HAVE NO DISPUTE WITH ŌGAMI-DONO. PLEASE RECONSIDER.
HEH HEH HEH.
I THINK YOU'RE SCARED, OZUNU.
OUR BENTENRA! BROTHERS FOUGHT ŌGAMI, AND PERISHED. IF OUR BEST MEN COULD NOT DEFEAT SUCH A SWORDMASTER, WHO AMONG US CAN? I CANNOT WASTE MORE MEN—OUR DUTY IS TO SERVE THE SHŌGUN!
I AM AWARE OF THAT, OZUNU! JUST FIND HIM— GUNBEI WILL FINISH HIM OFF!
Y-YAGYŪ GUNBEI-SAMA?!
HE RETURNED FROM THE NORTH LAST NIGHT, ANOTHER ASSASSINATION ACCOMPLISHED,. HEH! IF GUNBEI FIGHTS ITTŌ, VICTORY IS OURS.
GUNBEI-SAMA STILL LIVES..?


KSSSHH
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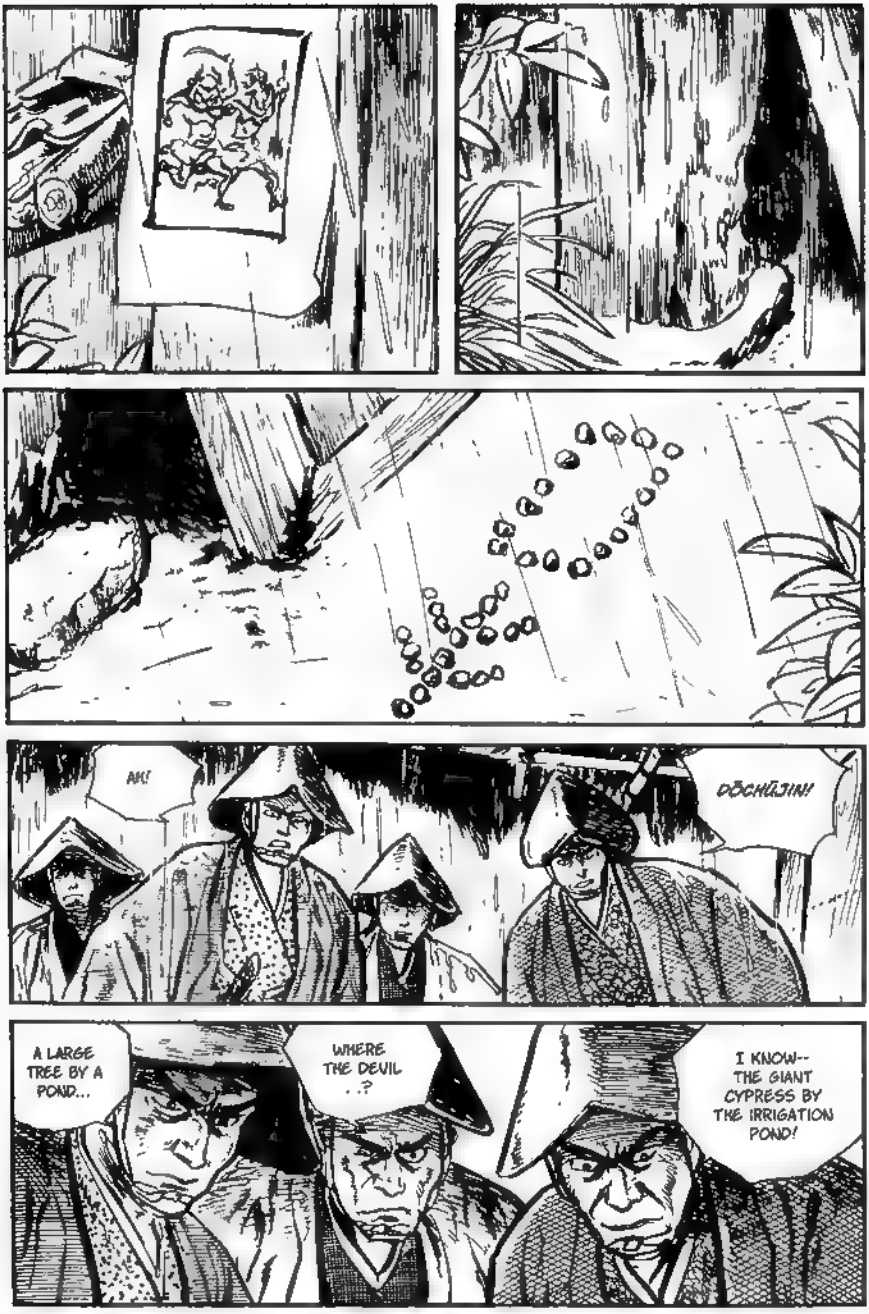
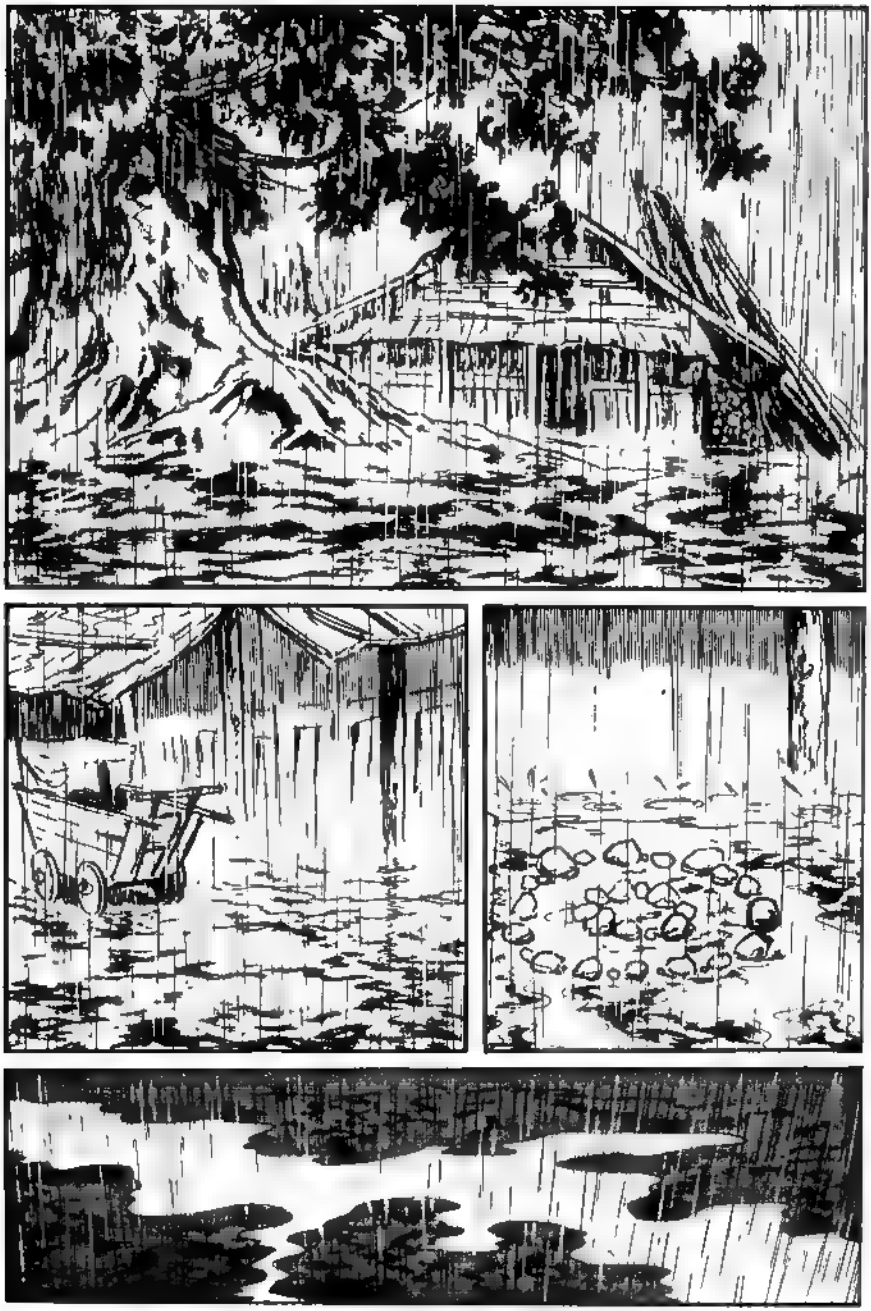
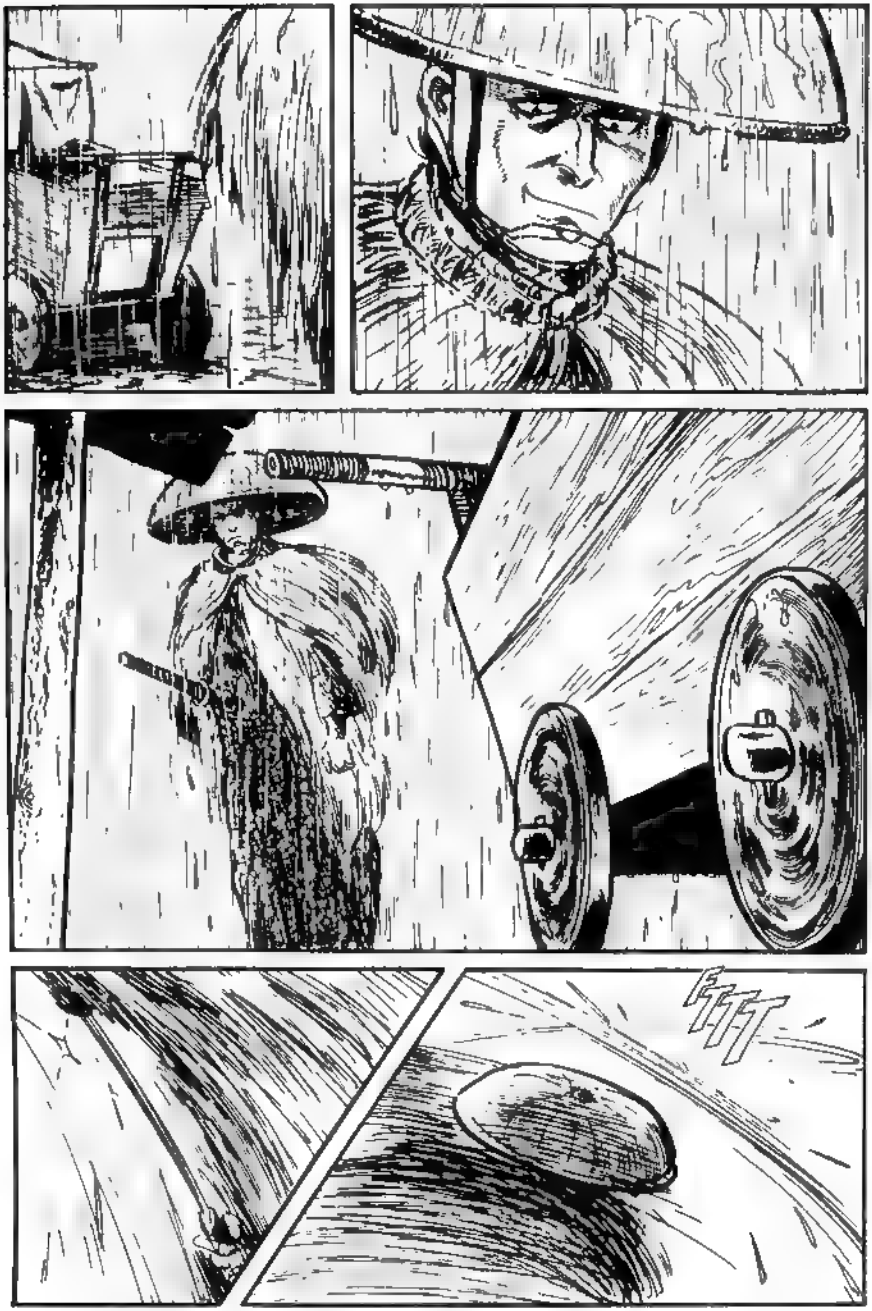
SPLISH
SPSH


AH!
OŌCHŪJIN!
A LARGE TREE BY A POND...
WHERE THE DEVIL . . .?
I KNOW-- THE GIANT CYPRESS BY THE IRRIGATION POND!

THE KŌSHŪ BYWAY, NEAR KOMAGINO.



SPLOKK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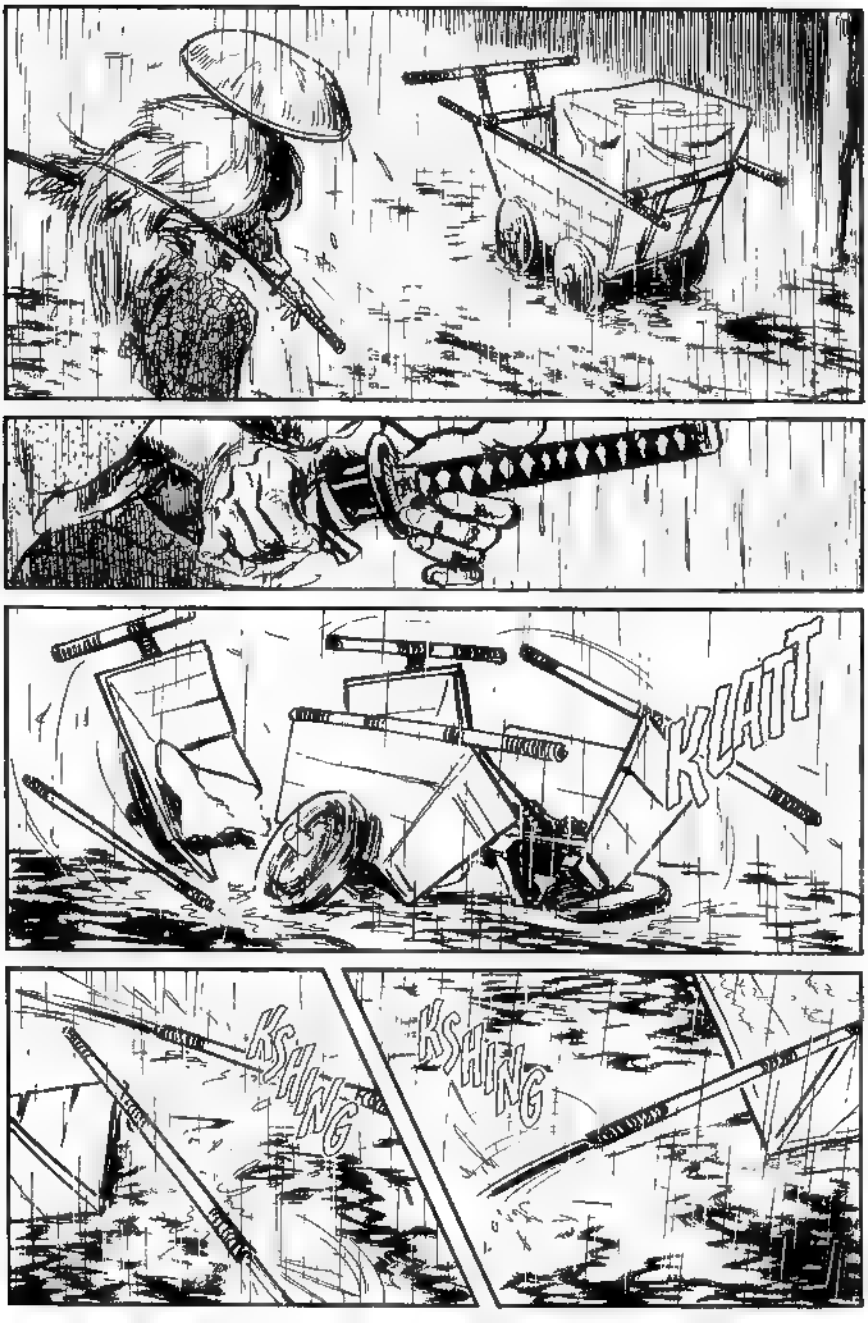
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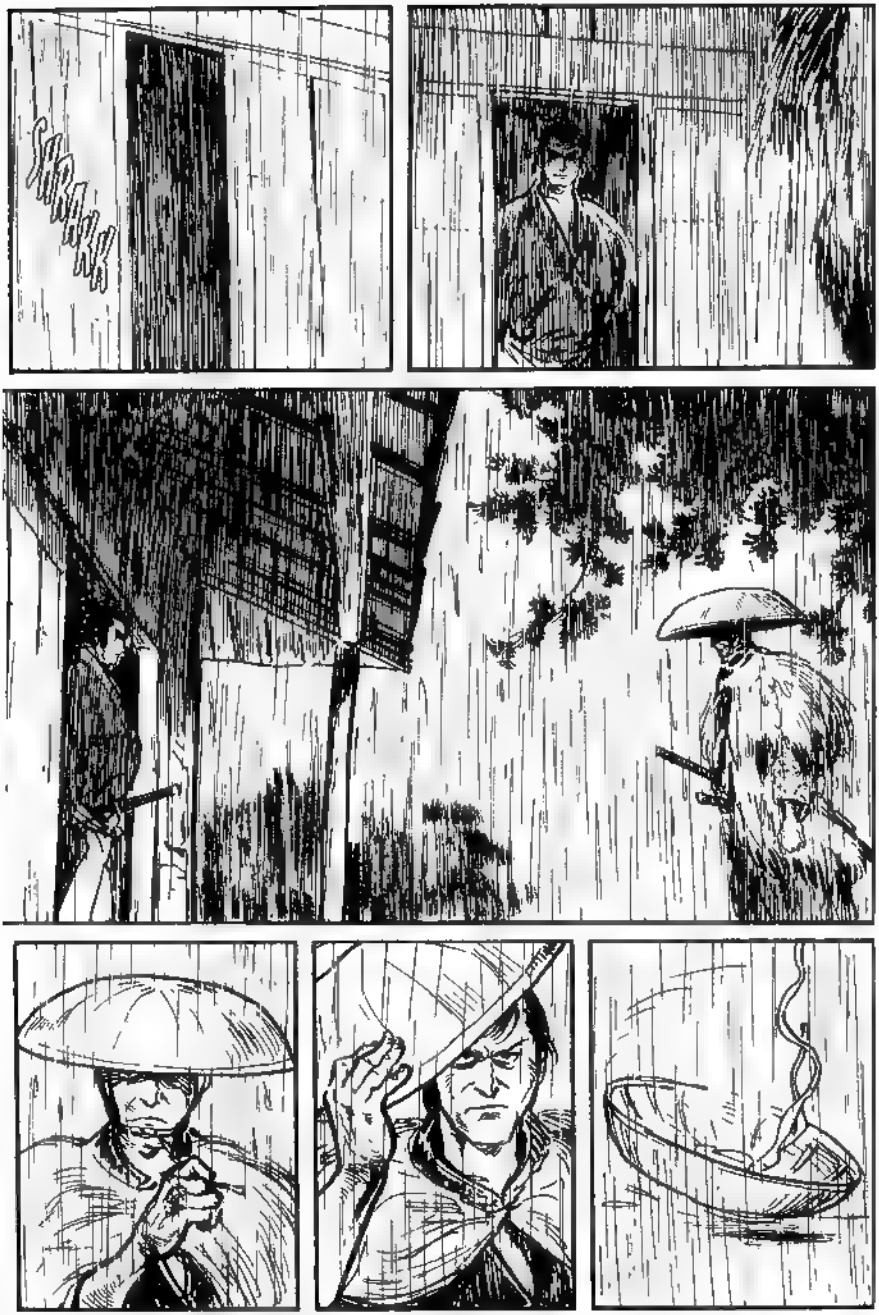


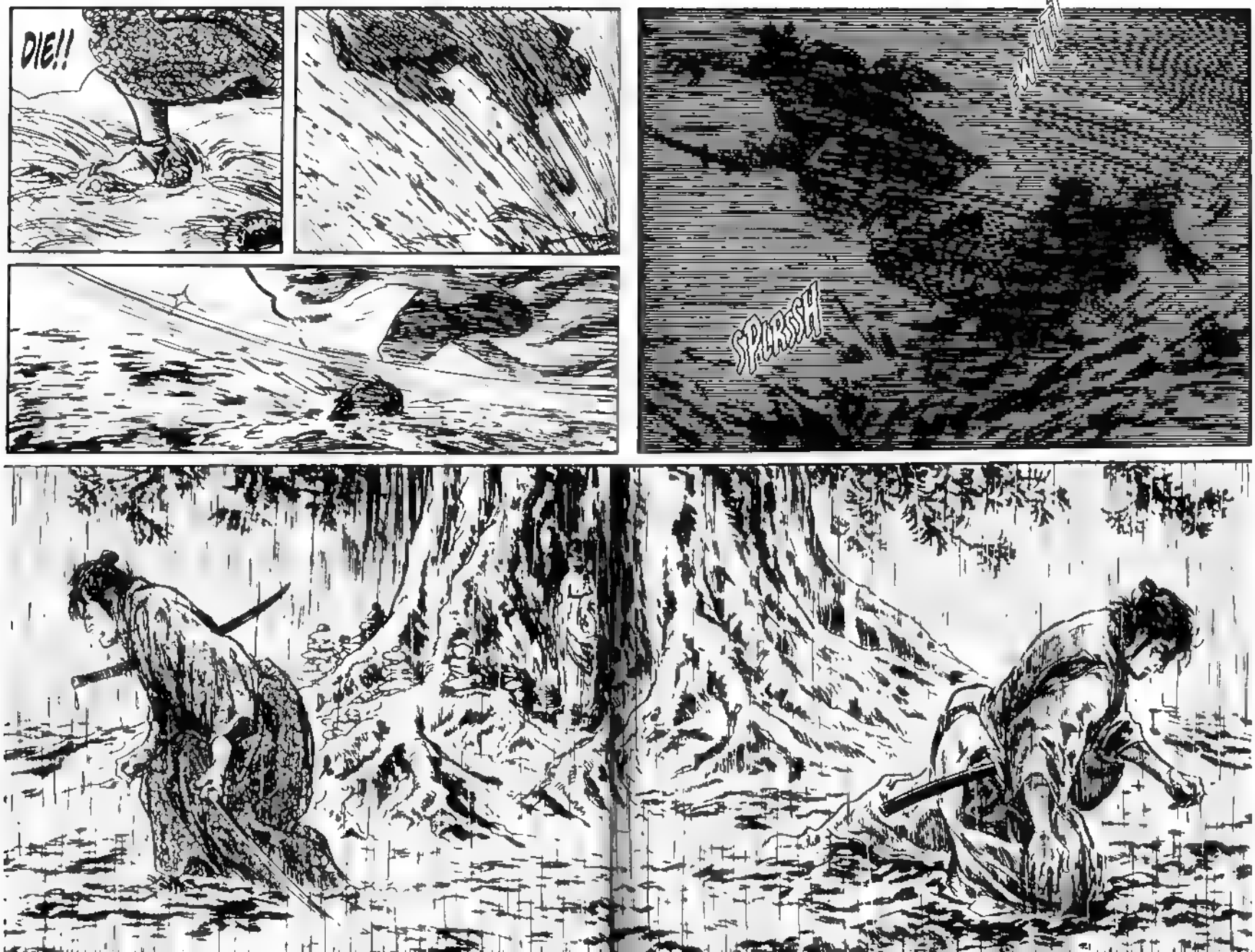
IT'S BEEN A WHILE, ITTŌ.
YAGYŪ GUNBEI!?
YOU SET OUT YOUR DŌCHŪJIN TO BRING IN CLIENTS. BUT YOU WERE JUST PILING ROCKS BY THE RIVERBANKS OF SAI, ITTŌ! YOU'VE SUMMONED THE GOD OF DEATH!
HEH HEH HEH.
SO. THE YAGYŪ BETRAY THEIR OWN WORD, AND SEEK MY LIFE.

WE BETRAY NOTHING, ITTŌ! I'M CHALLENGING YOU TO A DUEL.
AS A LONE SWORDSMAN! I'M HERE ALONE-- THAT'S PROOF ENOUGH.

YOU AND I WERE RIVALS FOR THE POST OF KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN, AND SO WE FOUGHT A DUEL BEFORE THE SHŌGUN HIMSELF!
. . . .
. . . .
AND I DEFEATED YOU, ITTŌ!
THE SHINMEI-RYŪ SWORD OF THE YAGYŪ CRUSHED YOUR SUIŌ SCHOOL!
. . . .
. . . .
YET THEY MADE YOU EXECUTIONER!
THE SWORDS OF THE YAGYŪ HAVE ASSASSINATED TOO MANY PEOPLE--NONE MORE THAN YOURS!
THEY ARE SWORDS OF DARKNESS! THE SHŌGUN WAS DISPLEASED.
HRRN!

AND AT THE CRUCIAL MOMENT, THE TIP OF YOUR SWORD POINTED STRAIGHT AT OUR LORD!
I LOST WHEN I MOVED TO PROTECT HIM! YOUR SWORD IS NO SAMURAI SWORD--IT'S A SWORD OF SLAUGHTER! YOU BUTCHER MEN LIKE SWINE!
I DEDICATED MY LIFE TO DOING THE SHŌGUN'S DIRTY WORK KILLING FOR THE TOKUGAWA AND THAT WAS MY REWARD?
WELL, IT'S HISTORY NOW. THE POST OF KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN BELONGS TO US! AND WHEN I KILL YOU, THE STORY OF THE ŌGAMI CLAN ENDS!
SKSSH
SHINGG

NOW WILL YOU USE YOUR SUN3 SWORDWORK IN MUD, ITTŌ?!
HEH. I COULD DEFEAT YOU EVEN ON DRY GROUND, BUT HERE YOU DON'T HAVE A CHANCE!
SPLKK
MY RAIN CLOAK WILL GIVE ME ALL THE FOOTING I NEED!
. . . .
. . . .


DIE!!
SWIFT
SPLASH

THROWING YOUR SWORD . . ON THE FIRST . PASS .?
N-NO TECHNIQUE. . LIKE THAT . . IN THE SUIŌ SCHOOL.
NO TECHNIQUE! NO SCHOOL!
NO SAMURAI HEART!
I HAVE ONLY . MEIFUMADŌ!
NNG...
SPISH
KTOK
KTOK
KTOK-KNAK!

INCREDIBLE. ŌBAM-DONO THREW HIS DŌTANUKI TO CATCH BUNBEI IN MID-STROKE!
A HAIR'S-BREADTH CALCULATION! MISS, AND HE'D BE CUT IN HALF.
STEALING LIFE FROM DEATH

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Scanner: Mavi

the twenty-fifth

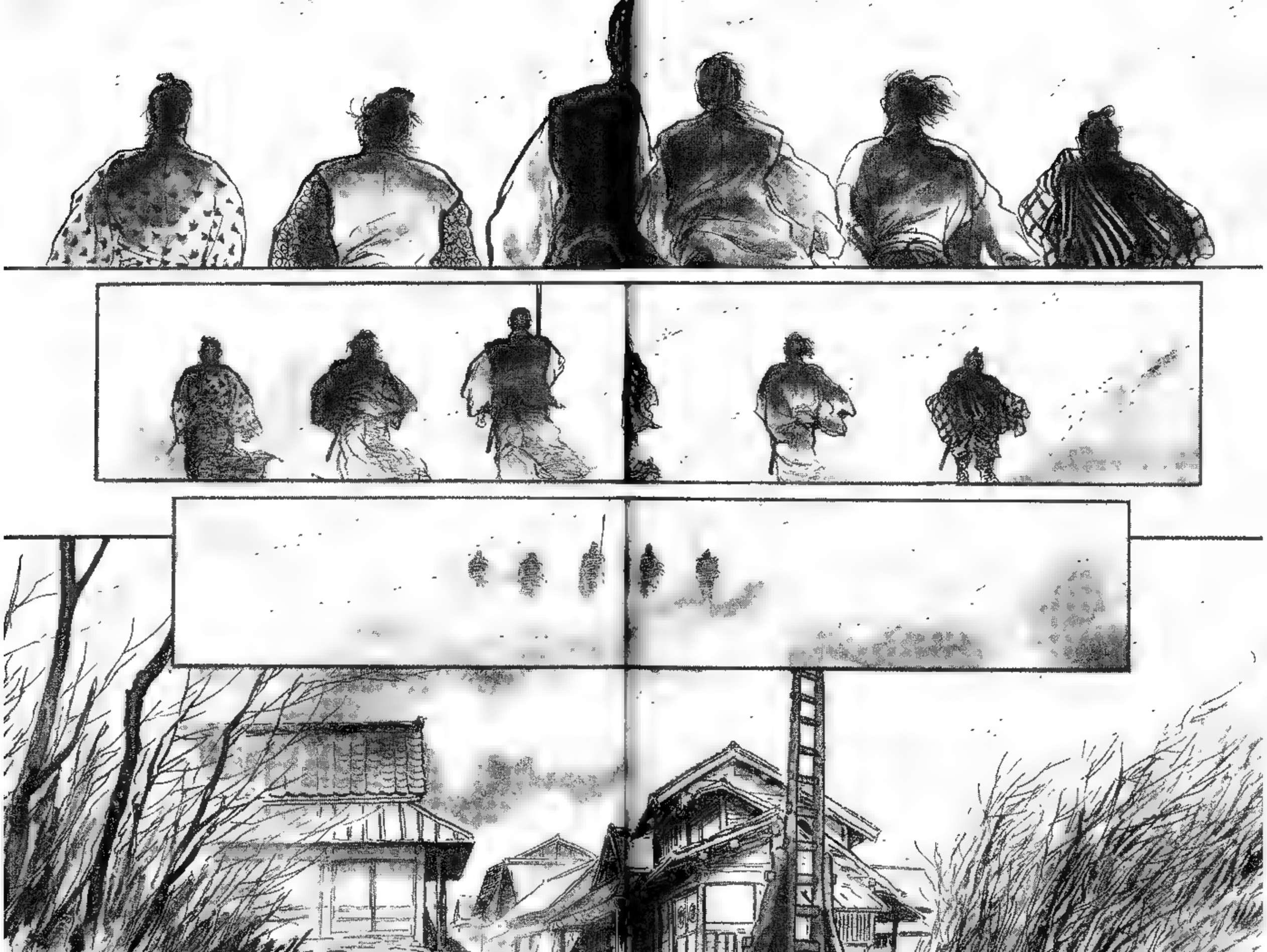
Executioner's Hill

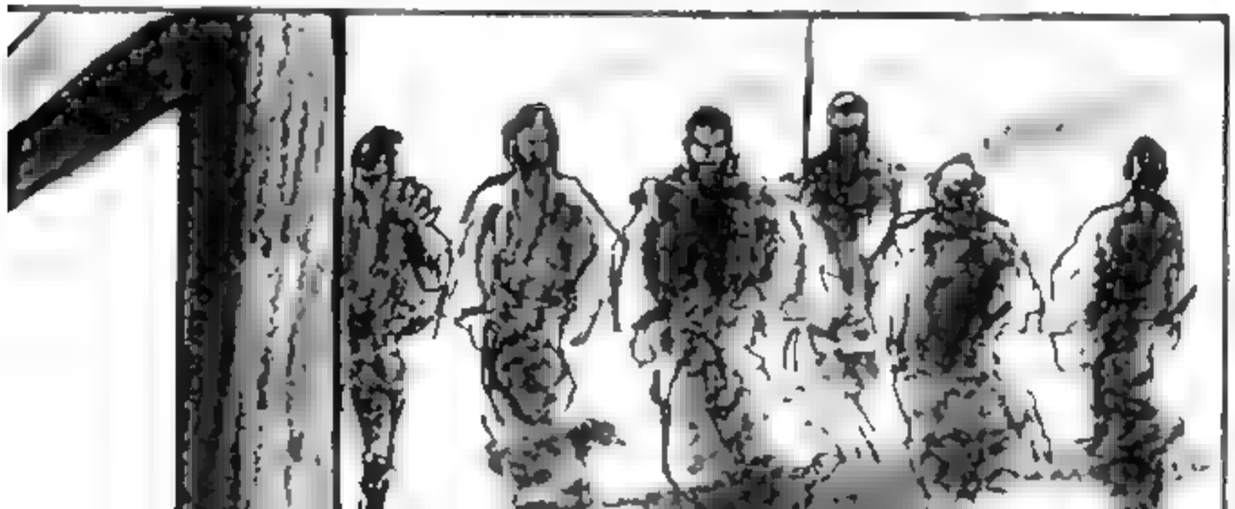
礼記

君子曰く 楽はその自ら生ずる所を楽しむ
礼はその本を忘れず
古の人に善あり
曰く狼死して正しく丘に首するは
たなり
楚辞
鳥は飛んで故郷に反り
狼は死するに必ず丘に首す

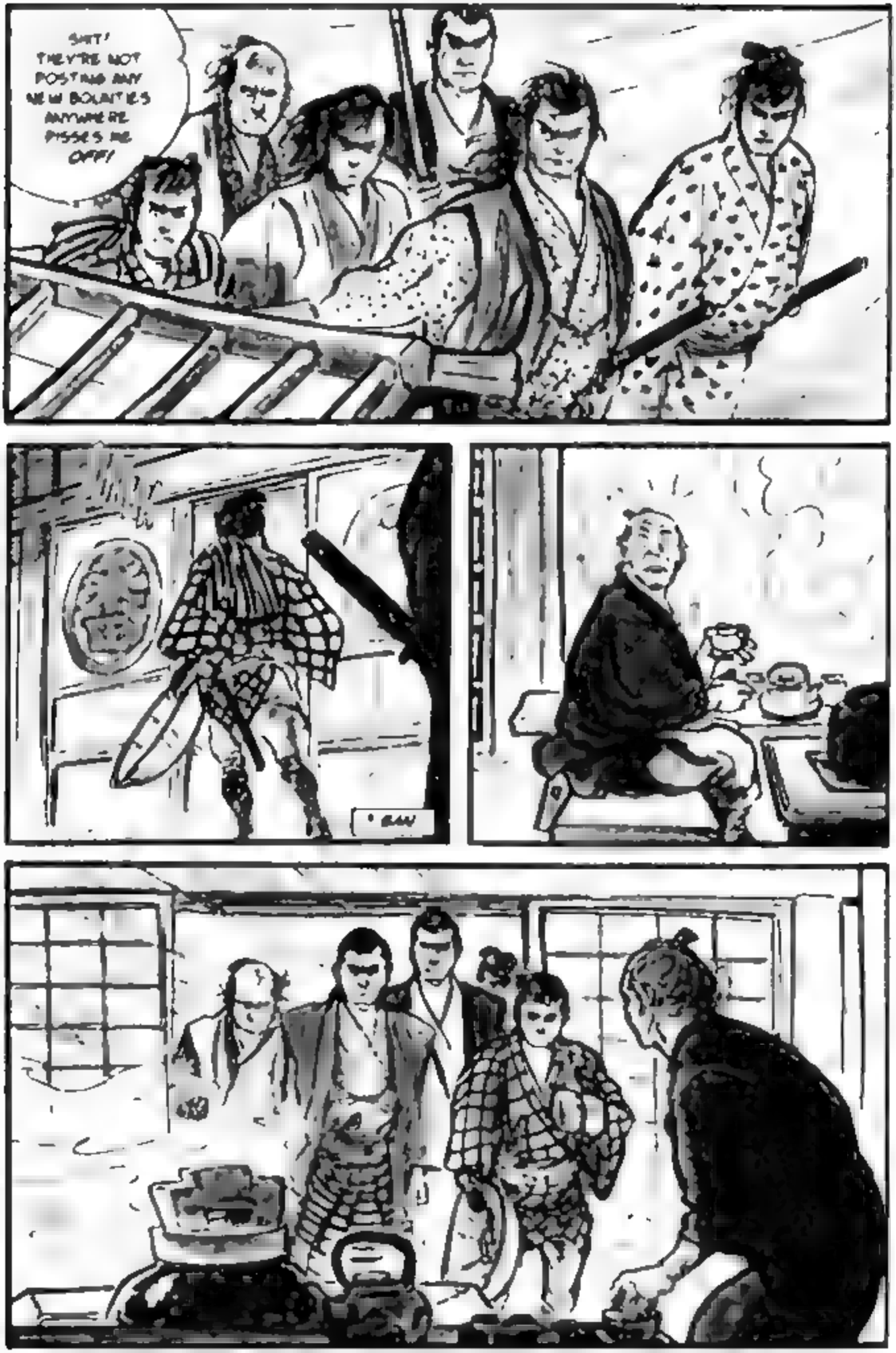
TRUE JOY IS TO TAKE PLEASURE
IN ONE'S OWN ACCOMPLISHMENTS;
COURTESY IS TO LEARN FROM THE MODELS OF THE PAST.
DID NOT THE ANCIENTS SAY, IN DEATH THE WOLF
TURNS HIS HEAD TOWARD THE HILLS?
THIS IS VIRTUE.

THE BIRDS FLY, RETURNING TO THEIR HOMELAND;
AND WITHOUT FAIL, THE DYING WOLF
TURNS HIS HEAD TOWARD THE HILLS.





WANTED

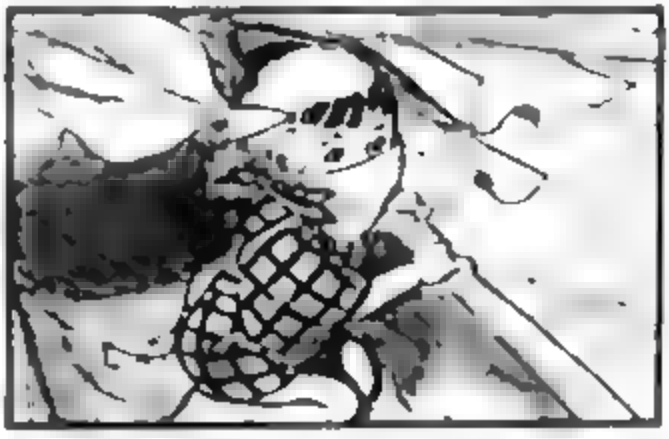

SHIT! THEY'RE NOT POSTING ANY NEW BOUNTIES ANYWHERE. PISSES ME OFF!

HEY! DON'T YOU GOT A TOWN BOSS OR SOMETHING?
N-NO, SIR ONLY ME.
DAMN! ONE OLD FART OF A COPP WHAT A DUMP
ANY NEW BOUNTIES?
SORRY SIR THEY AIN'T POSTED ONE FOR AGES NO, SIR
YOU GOT SAKE, RIGHT?
WH- WHO THE DICKENS ARE YOU?

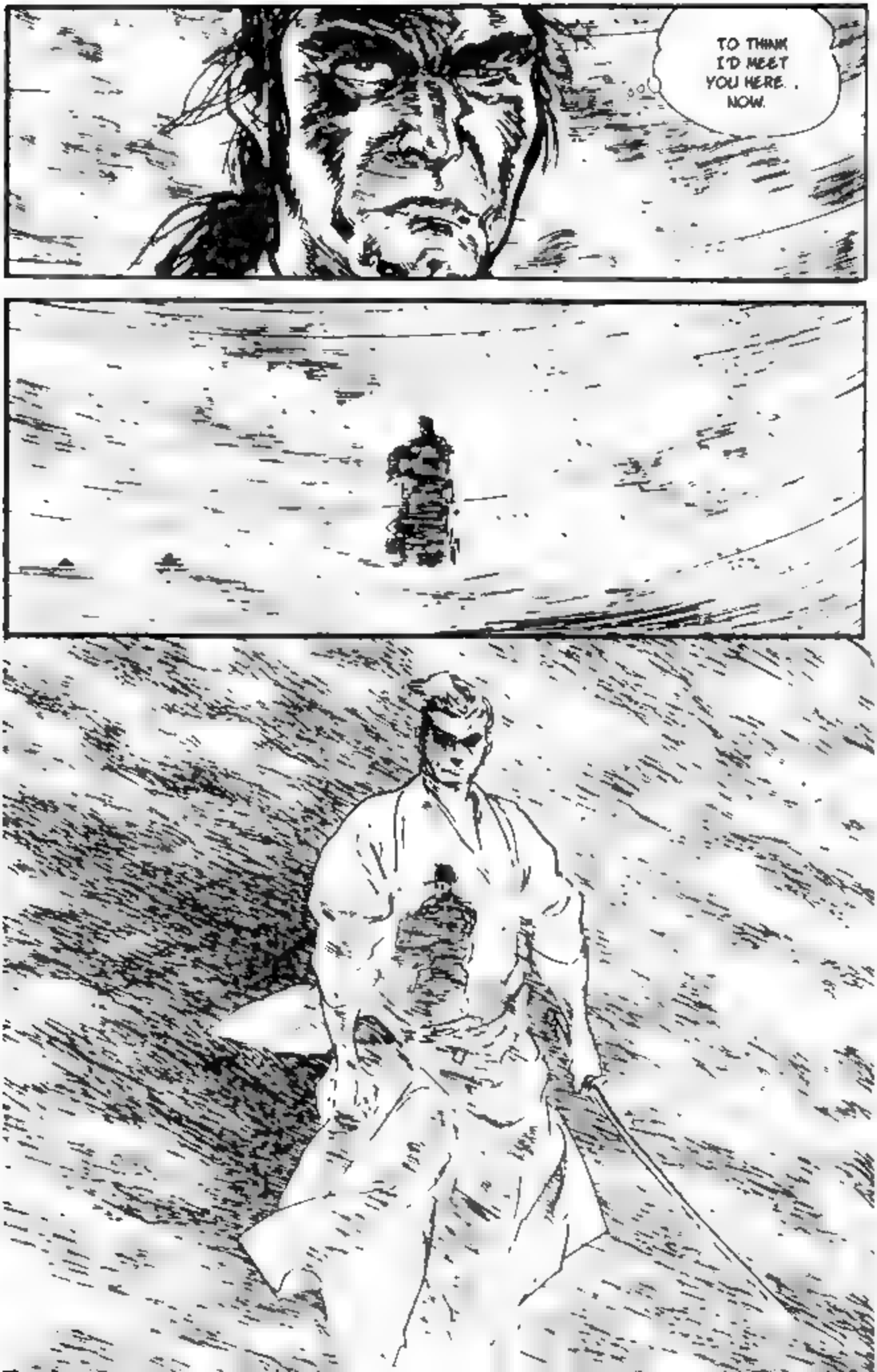
SHEE-IT! DON'T YA KNOW NOTHIN'? WE'RE THE ZODIAC GANG!
TH-THE ZODIAC GANG?!
THE B-B-BOUNTY HUNTERS?!
SO? SAY'R FY
J-JUST A DROP T' HELP ME SLEEP
THEN BRING IT OUT! THE ZODIAC GANG'S OUT WIPING UP THE SCUM YOU STAY UP NIGHTS WORRYIN' ABOUT--WE'RE YOUR CLEAN-UP CREW! YOU OUGHTTA BE ON YOUR KNEES THANKIN' US, OLD MAN!
Y YES, SIR

THAK
HEY, COPPER! AIN'T THERE ANY WORK HERE? BODYGUARDS, KILLINGS, WE DON'T CARE WHAT
THE KIND OF WORK THAT'D TAKE GENTS LIKE YOU ? NOT IN THESE PARTS, NO SIR!
SHEE-IT...WE AIN'T WORKED FOR WEEKS. WE'RE STONE BROKE, CAN'T EVEN MAKE A DAMN LIVING!
NOW WHAT, BOSS?
WE HAVE TO GO SOME-PLACE WHERE WE'RE NEEDED, THAT'S ALL.

WORLD'S GOTTEN TOO DAMN *PEACEFUL!* CAN'T DO *NOTHING* WITHOUT SOMEONE TO *KILL.* TAKES TWELVE TO MAKE A ZODIAC, AND *LOOK* AT US!
A DAMN *SIX-MONTH* "ZODIAC GANG"!



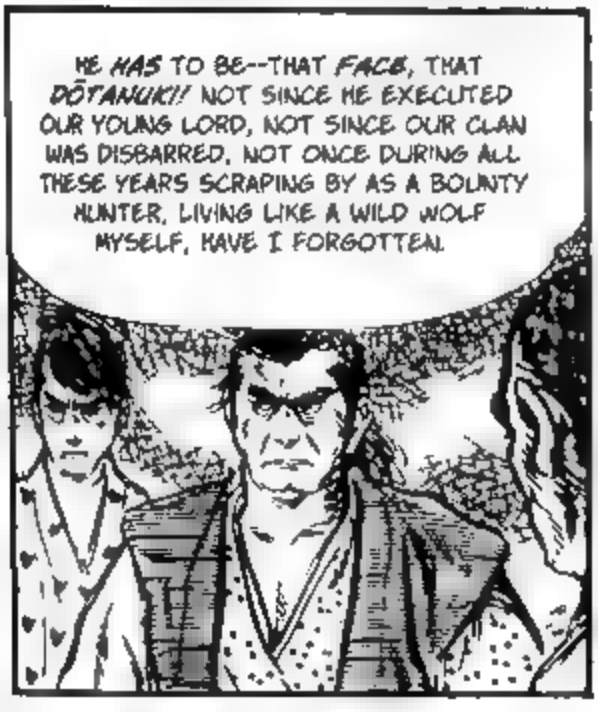
KEIMA! FOLLOW HIM.
BOSS ?!
WE JUST LANDED A FISH--A BIG ONE. TAIL THAT RŌNIN, AND FIND OUT WHERE HE'S SPENDING THE NIGHT
RIGHT! GOTCHA!


TO THINK I'D MEET YOU HERE. . NOW.

WHAT'S UP, SHIMASU ?!
THAT *RŌNIN* WITH THE KID WORTH MONEY ?
HE IS A *LOT* OF MONEY
THAT IS, IF HE'S *REALLY* ŌGAMI ITTŌ, THE FORMER *KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN* EXECUTIONER!

WHAT?!

I'VE HEARD RUMORS ABOUT HIM. THEY SAY HE LOST A FEUD WITH THE YAGYŪ CLAN, AND HAS BEEN WANDERING THE COUNTRY AS A HIRED ASSASSIN. *LONE WOLF AND CUB*, PEOPLE CALL HIM. BUT I HARDLY BELIEVE
LONE WOLF AND *CUB*?!
ARE YOU *SURE*?!
THAT GUY WITH THE *KID* JUST NOW?!

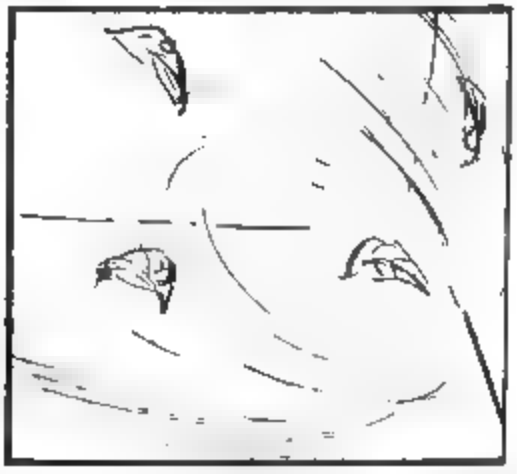

HE *HAS* TO BE--THAT *FACE*, THAT *DŌTANUKI*!! NOT SINCE HE EXECUTED OUR YOUNG LORD, NOT SINCE OUR CLAN WAS DISBARRED, NOT ONCE DURING ALL THESE YEARS SCRAPING BY AS A BOUNTY HUNTER, LIVING LIKE A WILD WOLF MYSELF, HAVE I FORGOTTEN.

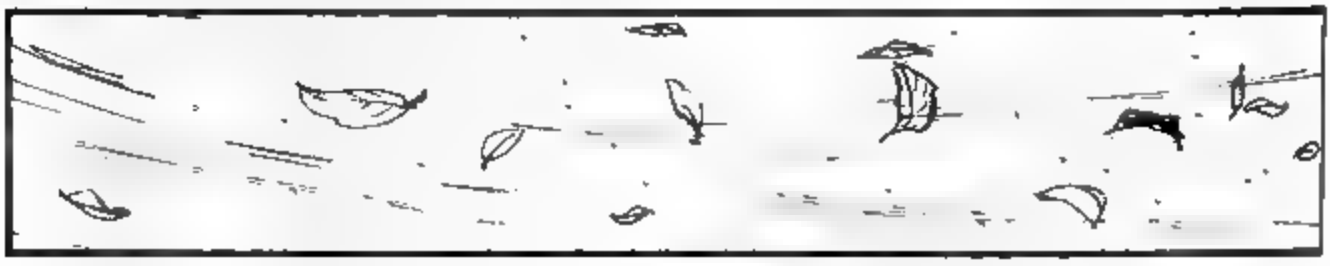
I COULD NOT FORGET HIM IF I *WANTED* TO!

I SEE NO PROFIT WHEN STARVING WOLVES FIGHT IN THE DUST

AGAIN, IT'S ONLY *RUMOR* BUT PEOPLE *ALSO* SAY HE GETS *FIVE HUNDRED RYŌ* PER KILLING
KILL TEN MEN... *FIVE THOUSAND RYŌ!* TWENTY MEN. *TEN THOUSAND RYŌ!*
THERE'S NO WAY HE CAN CARRY IT WITH HIM.
IF HE HAS SO MUCH MONEY, WHAT'S HE DOING OUT ON THE ROAD? HE AND HIS BOY COULD LIVE IN LUXURY THE REST OF THEIR LIVES.
JINZA'S RIGHT IF HE HAD ALL THAT CASH, HE WOULDN'T BE WEARING FILTHY RAGS, LIKE A STARVING BEGGAR!
BECAUSE IT WOULD TAKE MORE THAN TEN THOUSAND *RYŌ* TO *DESTROY THE YAGYŪ.*
WHAT?!
JUST TO GET THINGS GOING, HE'D HAVE TO SLIP AT LEAST FIVE THOUSAND INTO THE RIGHT HANDS IN THE SHŌGUNATE
AND THEN, IF HE WANTED THE SHŌGUN'S PERMISSION TO RE-ESTABLISH THE ŌGAM. CLAN, HE'D HAVE TO FIGHT THE YAGYŪ THEM-SELVES.
..LEAVING ALL TO HIS CHILD SHOULD HE DIE IN BATTLE.
I GET IT FIRST, PAY OFF THE SHŌGUNATE TO INVESTIGATE THE YAGYŪ.. HMM.

MAKES SENSE.
WITH FIFTY THOUSAND RYŌ, WE OURSELVES MIGHT HAVE INFLUENCED THE RŌJŪ, AND SAVED OUR HAN
MM.
SO, IN THIS WORLD, MONEY MAKES EVERYTHING GO AROUND EXCEPT THE SHŌGUN HIMSELF?
AND YOU THINK THAT'S WHY HE'S BEEN TRAVELLING LIKE A STARVING WOLF? HE'S SAVING THE MONEY HE GETS FOR HIS KILLINGS ?
YES IF HE BECAME AN ASSASSIN NOT JUST TO SURVIVE, BUT AS PART OF A QUEST TO DESTROY THE YAGYŪ, THEN.
THEN THERE IS MONEY!
RIGHT!
LET'S DO IT!





NOW, THIS IS THE MAN THEY PICKED TO BE SHŌGUN'S EXECUTIONER
HIS SUIŌ SCHOOL ZANBATŌ STROKE IS SUPPOSED TO BE STRONGER THAN THE SWORDS OF THE YAGYŪ.
MEANING EVEN SHIHASU IKKAKU'S MUGAI-RYŪ ZANJINKEN TECHNIQUE CAN'T DEFEAT HIM?
NOT EVEN WITH SHIMOZUKI JINZA'S GEKKAN-RYŪ SHORT SPEAR AT MY SIDE!
THEN THE FIVE OF US TAKE HIM TOGETHER!
REMEMBER, WE'RE NOT OUT TO KILL
OUR FIRST OBJECTIVE IS TO MAKE HIM TELL US WHERE TO FIND THE GOLD
WHY DON'T WE TAKE THE BOY?

YES. THAT'S OUR BEST CHOICE. IF HE'S OUT TO REBUILD HIS CLAN, HE MUST PLAN TO LEAVE EVERYTHING TO HIS SON. IF HE LOSES THE BOY, IT'S ALL OVER.
WE SIT HERE PLANNING A KIDNAPPING..? HOW PATHETIC! WE SHOULD DECIDE IT BY FORCE OF ARMS!
PUT IT BEHIND YOU, JINZA! FORGET YOUR SAMURAI PRIDE.
WHAT WE WANT ISN'T BATTLE--
--IT'S MONEY !!
THE MONEY OF THE WOLF
.THAT'S ALL WE WANT!
TAK KTAK
WHOOOSH!

HE'S HOLED UP IN A HUT BY THE MIZUMIRAI RIVER.
GUESS HE FIGURED IT WASN'T WORTH FIGHTING THIS DUST STORM.
GOOD
GIN-NO-JI!
YEAH, BOSS?
FWIP FWIP
HOW WOULD YOU CAPTURE THAT BOY HE'S WITH?
HAGGK
IF THAT'S WHAT YA WANT, LEAVE IT TO ME!
YOU CATCH A KID WITH SOUND, THAT'S WHAT! HEH HEH HEH. WAIT AND SEE!

WHSSSHH

KAK KAK

TOK TOK

TOK TOKK-TOK

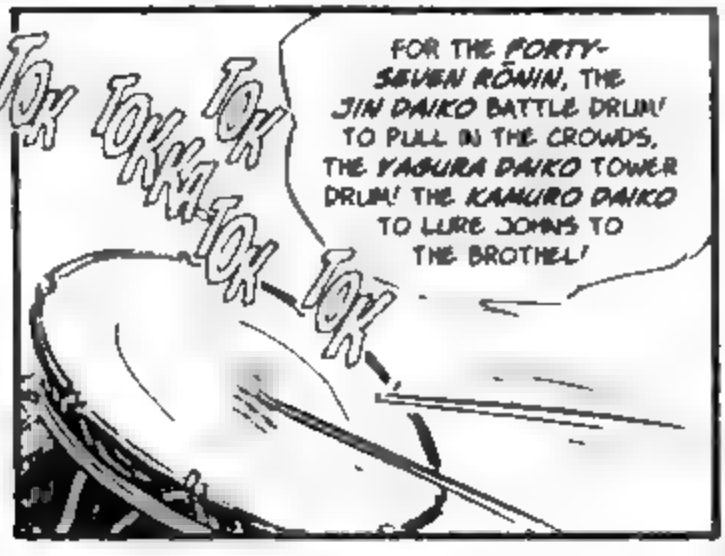
TOK TOK

TOK TOKK-TOK

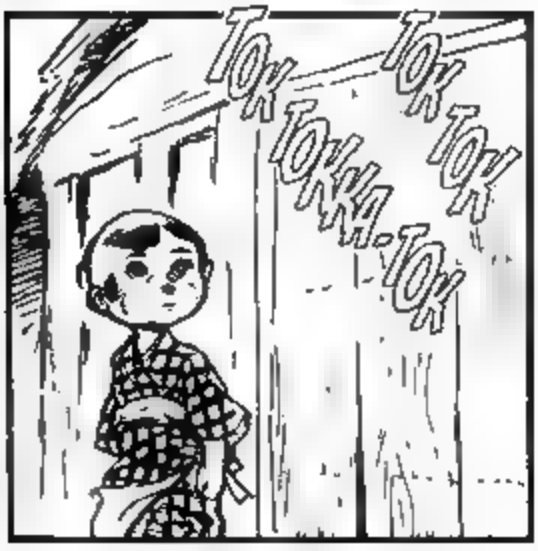
TOK TOK

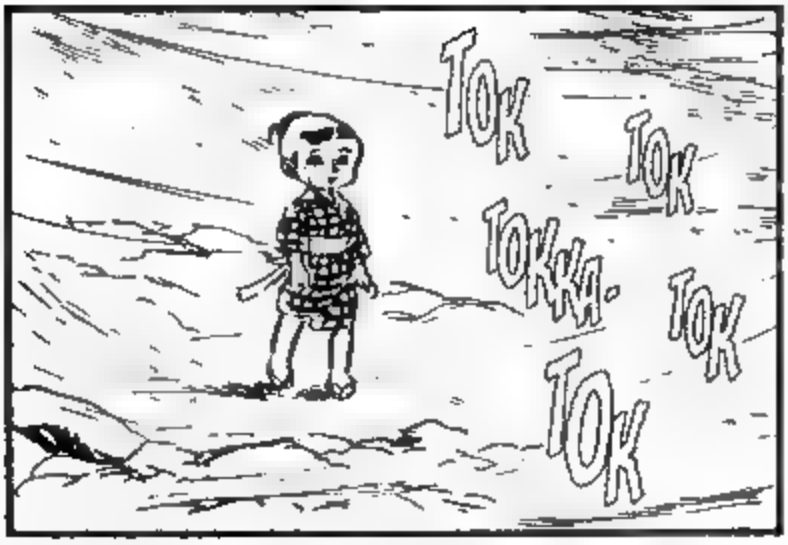
TOK TOK TOK TOK TOK

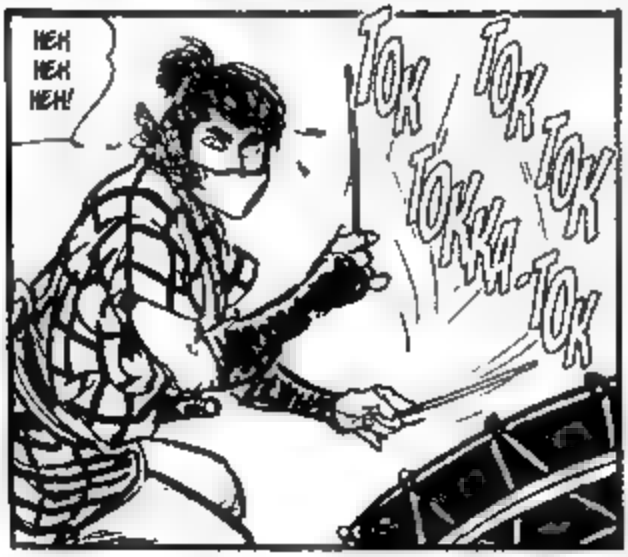
TOK TOK TOK TOK TOK
IF YOU'RE DRIVING BEASTS IN THE BUSH, BEAT THE OKEKO DAIKO HUNTER'S DRUM!


TOK TOK TOK TOK TOK
FOR THE FORTY-SEVEN RŌNIN, THE JIN DAIKO BATTLE DRUM! TO PULL IN THE CROWDS, THE YAGURA DAIKO TOWER DRUM! THE KANJIRO DAIKO TO LURE JOHNS TO THE BROTHEL!

TOK TOK TOK TOK TOK
TO CATCH A KID? AMEURI DAIKO. THE BEAT OF THE CANDY SELLER'S DRUM!!


TOK TOK TOK
TOKKA-TOK


TOK TOK
TOKKA- TOK
TOK

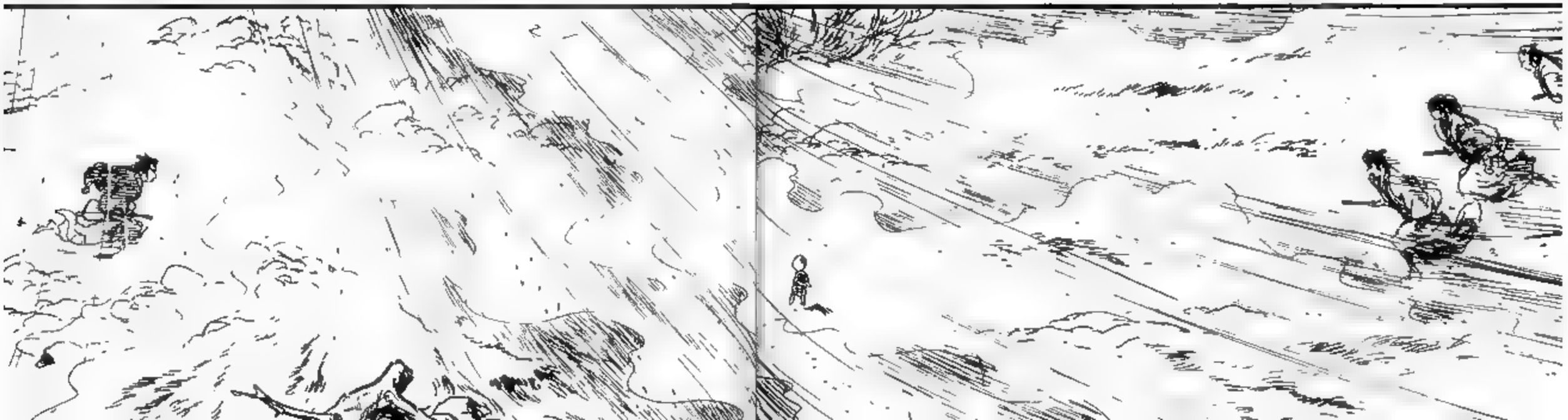

HEH HEH HEH!
TOK TOK TOK
TOKKA-TOK

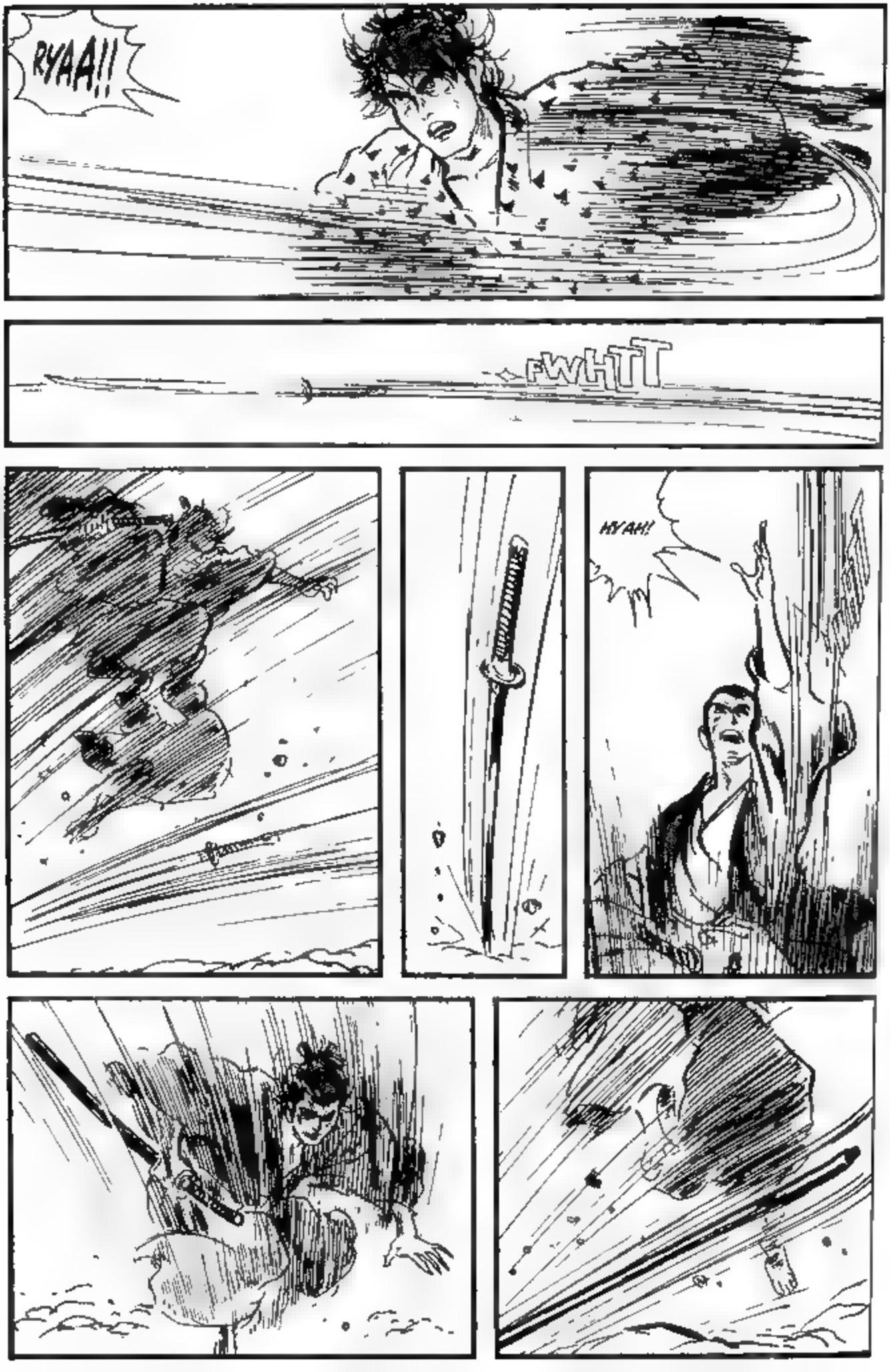
TOKKA-TOK
TOK TOK TOK
TOK TOK

NOW!!

RRNG!

LEAVE THE WOLF TO ME!
YOU GET THE CUB!




RYAA!!
FWHTT
MYAH!

CHOKK
NNG!!

OW!!
COME ON, KID-- GIVE IT UP!
MANG! MANG!

WHAT A SURPRISE, ŌGAMI-DONO.
HEH HEH HEH
. . . . . .

I DOUBT YOU REMEMBER MY FACE, BUT YOURS IS ONE I'LL NEVER FORGET!
YOU TOLD OUR YOUNG LORD TO PUT HIS FAN TO HIS STOMACH. AND THEN THAT DŌTANUKI YOU'RE CARRYING CHOPPED OFF HIS HEAD BEFORE MY VERY EYES!
IF WE CUT OFF YOUR BOY'S HEAD, WE'LL JUST BE FOLLOWING OUR LORD'S DYING WISHES!
. . . .
. . . .
BUT IN THIS HARDSCRABBLE WORLD, FEALTY WON'T PUT FOOD ON THE TABLE!
GIVE US THE GOLD YOU'VE GOTTEN FROM YOUR KILLINGS, AND WE'LL LET BYGONES BE BYGONES.
WELL?! WHAT SAY YOU?!
. . . .
. . . .

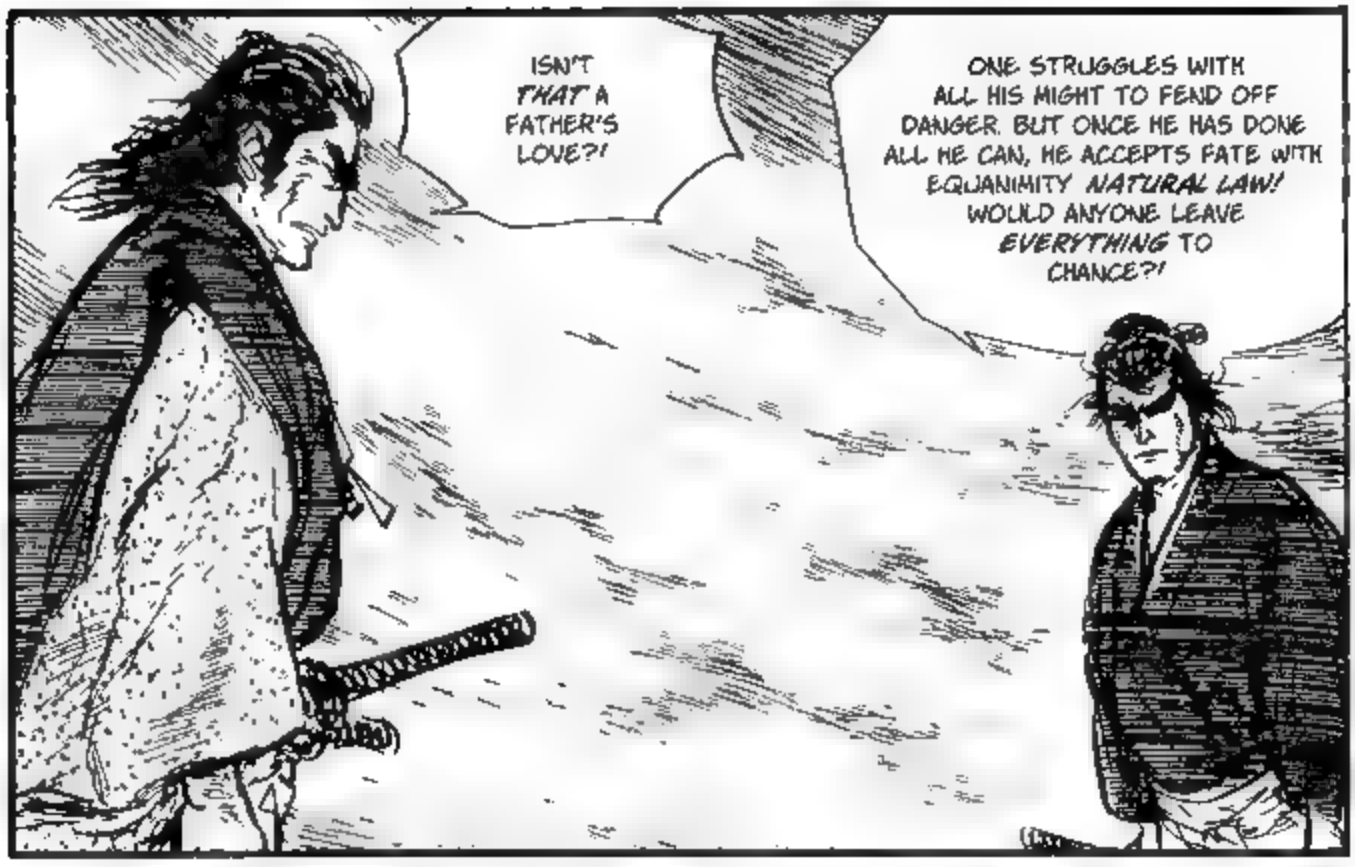
WHSSSH
WHERE IS THE MONEY?! SPEAK!
LOSE YOUR CHILD, AND YOUR QUEST IS LOST AS WELL!
YOU CAN ALWAYS GET MORE MONEY
COME ON--WE'VE ALREADY WON!
WELL, ŌGAMI ITTŌ?!
I REFUSE.

WHAT?! YOU DON'T CARE IF WE HACK OFF HIS HEAD?!
IF YOU THINK YOU CAN DO IT, GO AHEAD
BUT IT WILL BRING YOU NOTHING.
W-WHAT?!
YOU THINK WE'RE BLUFFING?!
NO. I DO NOT BUT MY SON DIES. WE FIGHT
AND WHAT REMAINS? CORPSES IN THE SAND.

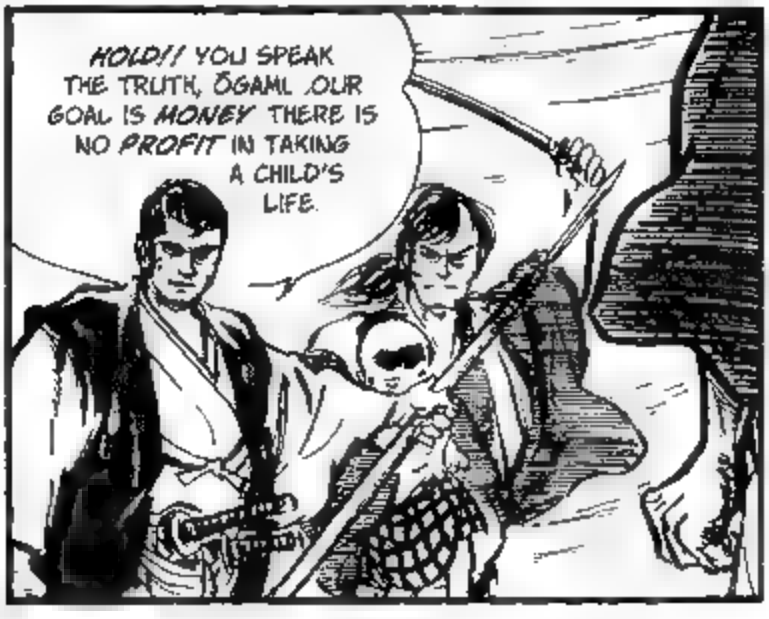
YOU WANT ONLY MONEY KILLING THE CHILD WILL NOT GET YOU ANY
YET IT IS A FATHER'S NATURE TO DEFEND THE LIFE OF HIS CHILD ALL THE MORE SO WHEN YOUR QUEST HANGS ON THAT BOND

NO. WE LIVE IN *MEIFUMADŌ*, FATHER AND SON *TOGETHER!*
UNDER-STANDING FROM THE BEGINNING THAT WE DEFY THE RULES OF *RIKU-DŌ SHISHŌ*, THE SIX PATHS AND THE FOUR LIVES!

IF WE LOSE EVERYTHING IN THIS PLACE, THEN SUCH WAS OUR FATE ON THIS DEMONS' ROAD *SO BE IT!*
?! THEN ONE QUESTION!
WHEN YOU SAW YOUR SON WAS IN DANGER, WHY RUSH TO HIS DEFENSE?!


ISN'T *THAT* A FATHER'S LOVE?!
ONE STRUGGLES WITH ALL HIS MIGHT TO FEND OFF DANGER. BUT ONCE HE HAS DONE ALL HE CAN, HE ACCEPTS FATE WITH EQUANIMITY *NATURAL LAW!* WOULD ANYONE LEAVE *EVERYTHING* TO CHANCE?!

ENOUGH CRAP!
I'LL *KILL* THE BRAT!! I *WILL!*


HOLD!! YOU SPEAK THE TRUTH, ŌGAMI. OUR GOAL IS *MONEY*. THERE IS NO *PROFIT* IN TAKING A CHILD'S LIFE.

TO LIVE IN *MEIFUMADŌ*.. ACCEPTING ALL THE REVERSALS OF *RIKUDŌ SHISHŌ*.

IT BRINGS IT ALL BACK, DOESN'T IT ? THERE WAS A TIME WHEN *I* CURSED THE *SHŌGUN*
I SWORE I'D LIVE BY *MEIFUMADŌ* AND ATTACK THE *SHŌGUN'S* PROCESSION ALL ALONE, IF THAT'S WHAT IT TOOK TO AVENGE OUR LORD.

PTEH!
BUT A YEAR WENT BY ..THEN ANOTHER. DAY AFTER DAY, HOW TO GET FOOD, WHERE TO FIND SHELTER, HOW TO MAKE IT TO TOMORROW...
AND NOW LOOK AT ME! I CAN HARDLY EVEN REMEMBER OUR LORD'S FACE
W-WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU GUYS?! HURRY UP AND KILL HIM! HE'S JUST SETTING YOU UP!!
HE'S TRYING TO TRAP YOU WITH WORDS! THE GUY'S USING HIS TONGUE LIKE A SWORD!
SILENCE!!
DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE IN MEIFUMADŌ?! IT MEANS LETTING YOUR OWN KID DECIDE WHETHER TO LIVE OR DIE!
IT MEANS IF YOUR CHILD CHOOSES DEATH, YOU KILL HIM WITH YOUR OWN HANDS!

IT'S MORE PAINFUL TO LIVE THAN TO *DIE!* HOW MUCH EASIER TO SLEEP *FOREVER*.
YOU'RE A *YAKUZA!* DON'T TELL ME *YOU'VE* NEVER FELT THAT WAY! *EH?!*
. . . .
. . . .
WHSSHH
WHSSHH
AN ASSASSIN WITH A CHILD.
IT MUST BE LIKE HAVING SHACKLES ON YOUR ARMS AND LEGS. BUT IF YOU *ALREADY* WALK IN *MEIFUMADŌ*, IT ALL MAKES SENSE.
BUT .. IT'S TOO LATE TO TURN BACK.
RELEASE THE BOY!
B- BUT

WE MIS-CALCULATED NO MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR GOLD
. . . . . .
HOWEVER
IF WE TAKE YOUR HEAD TO YOUR ENEMIES, THERE'S MONEY IN THAT!
YEAH! THE YAGYŪ WOULD PAY A FORTUNE!
YOU'RE RIGHT! I DIDN'T SEE IT BEFORE. THE HEAD OF ŌGAMI ITTŌ THAT WE CAN SELL!
HEH HEH WE'RE BOUNTY HUNTERS, ANYWAY!

SO *THIS* IS MORE *LIKE* IT!

WE'LL *HAVE* THAT HEAD!

SHIHASU IKKAKU! *MUGAI-RYŪ!*

SHIMOZUKI JINZA! *GEKKAN RYŪ!*

KEIMA-NO-GINJ!

SAMIDARE TANBA!

MINAZUK TSUESUKE!

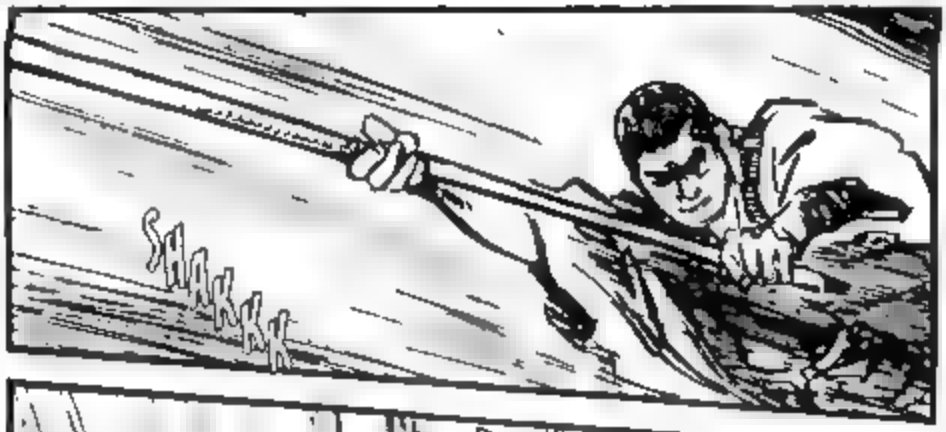
SHIGURE UKYŌ!

ŌGAMI ITTŌ..
SUIŌ-RYŪ!

KAWW
KAWW
WHSSSH

NYAH!
HA'S!

SKSSH


SHAKK

KRANG

THAP
VHVVV
WHTT
FWHSSH

WSSH
KYAAAH!
THUKK
NGGRK!
LIRNN..
NNNG.

KYAH!
KCHAK
FSST

SHOKK
HRRG!
NNG

AAA!!

AIEEEE!!!

GYAA!

FWOO

FWEEE

PAPA !
WHSSSSH!!
WHSSSSH!!
THE BIRDS FLY, RETURNING TO THEIR HOMELAND... WITHOUT FAIL, THE DYING WOLF TURNS HIS HEAD TOWARD THE HILLS.
BUT AROUND THIS FATED FATHER AND HIS CHILD, THE WILD DOGS GATHER, READY TO SAVAGE EVEN THOSE WILD WINGS; EVEN THAT WOLF IN DEATH...

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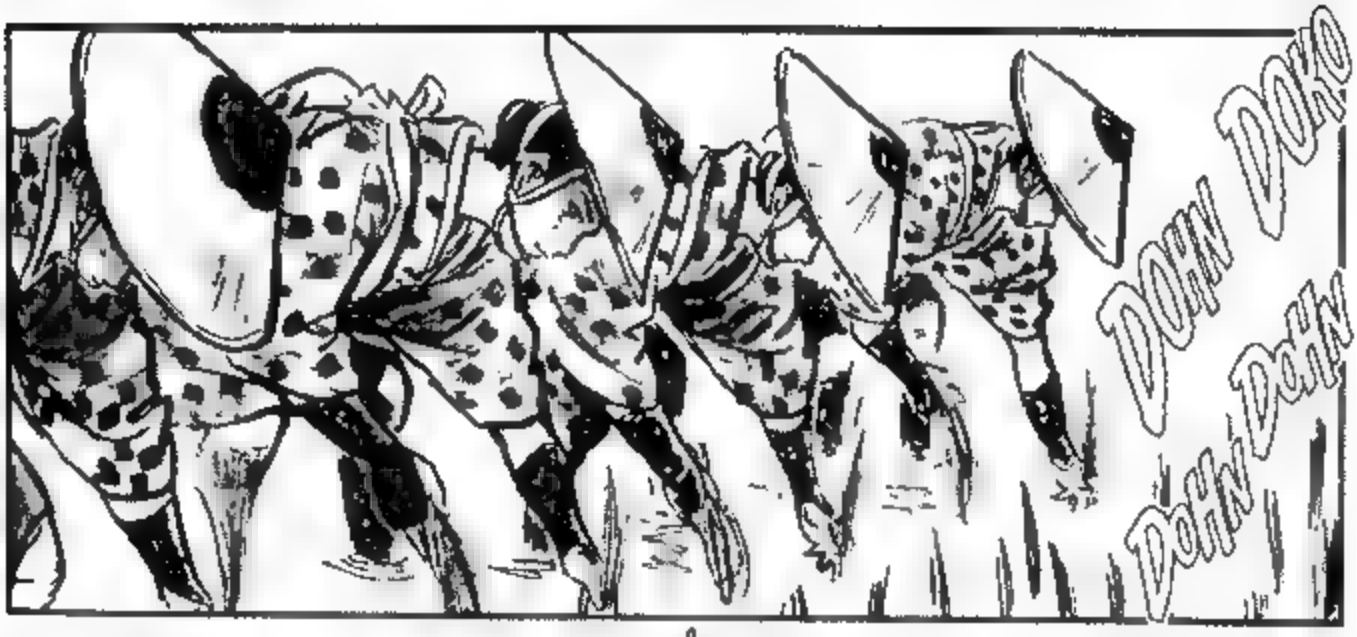
the twenty-sixth

Black Wind

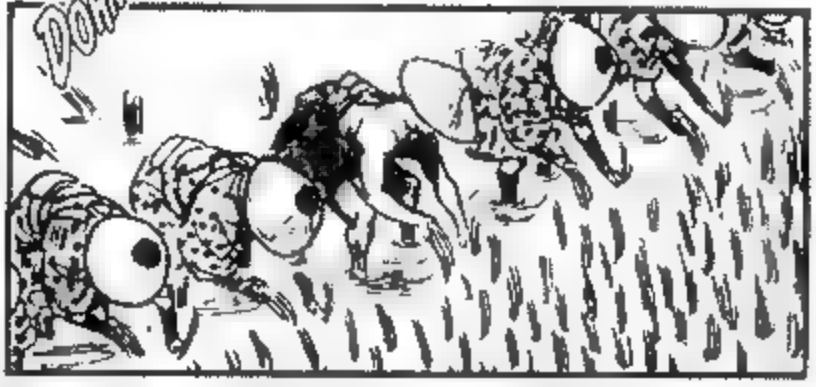

DOHN DOH
DOHN DOHN

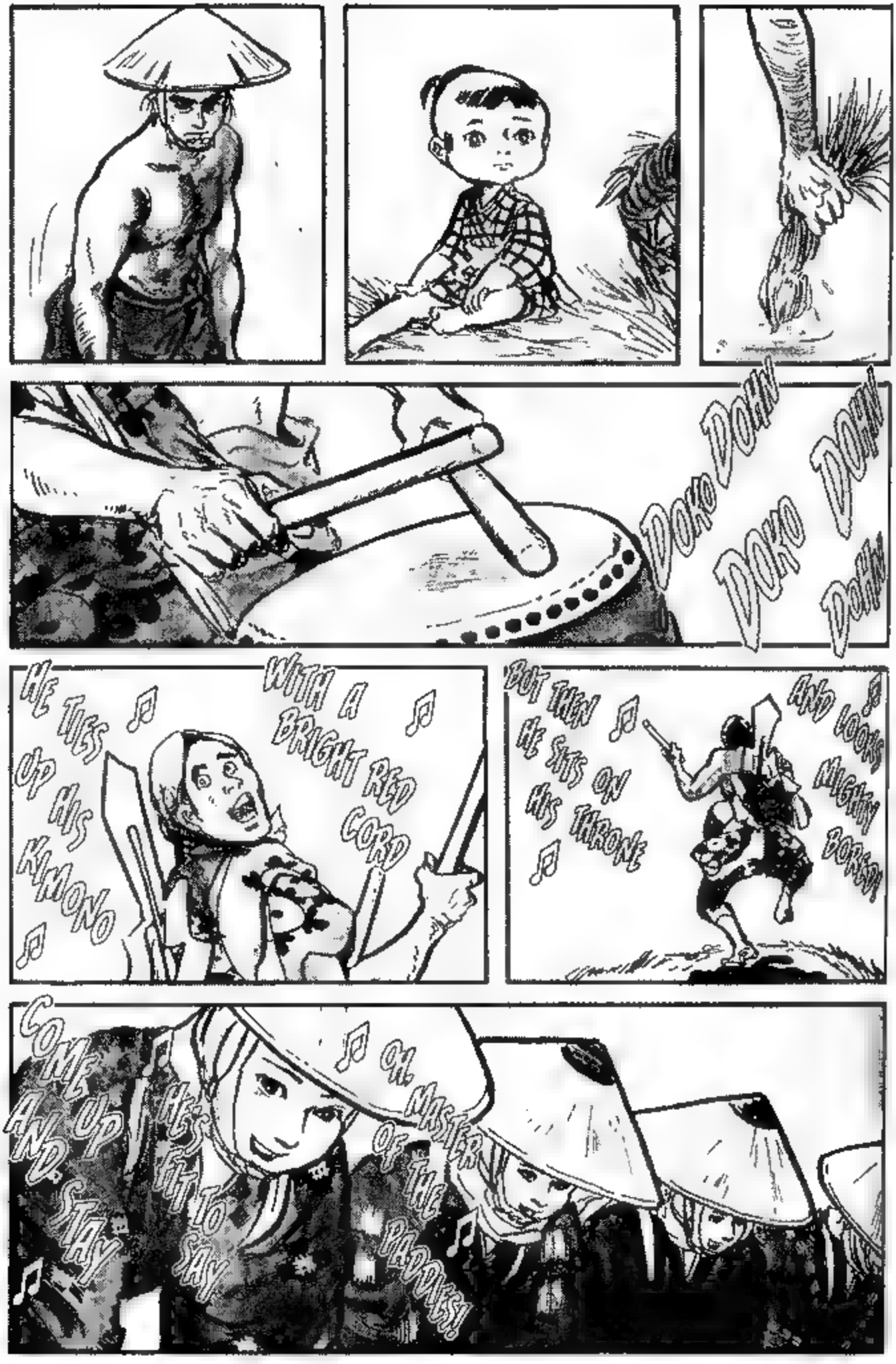
HE THINKS
UP IN
TAKAMA-GA-
A GOD HARA
DOHN DOHN

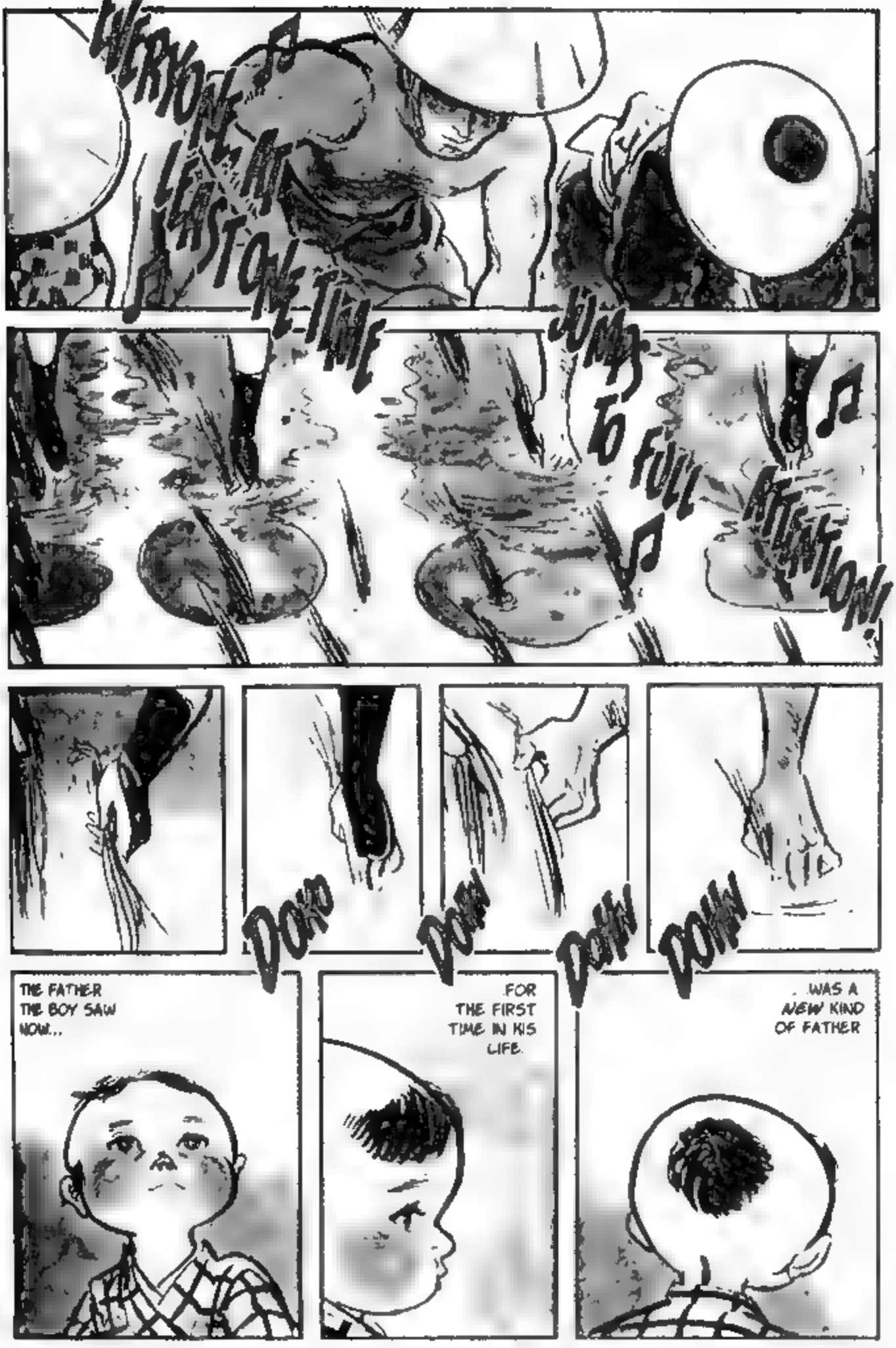
OF THE RICE
PADDY GODS!
HE MUST
BE THE
FATHER

AHH AHH
THE FATHER
OF THEM AHH

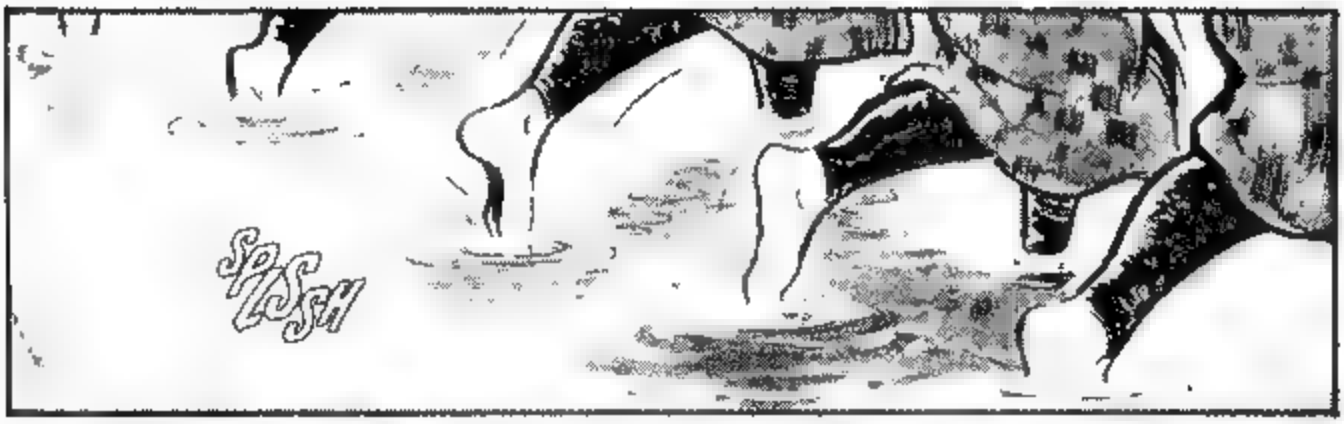
DOHN
DOHN
DOHN



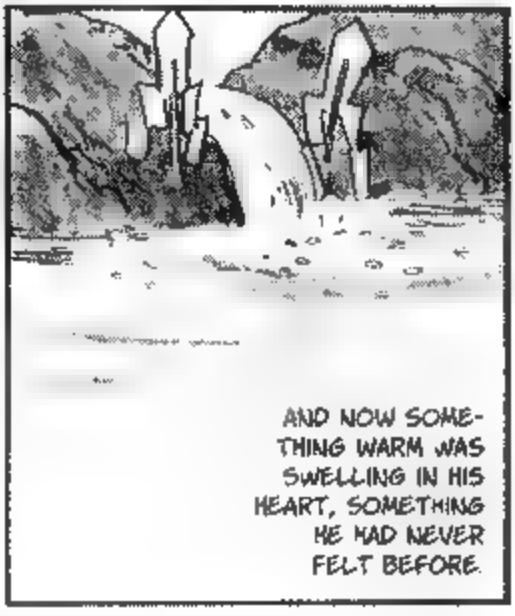

DOKO DOH!
DOKO DOH!
DOHH
HE TIES UP HIS KIMONO
WITH A BRIGHT RED CORD
BUT THEN HE SITS ON HIS THRONE
AND LOOKS MIGHTY BORED!
COME UP AND STAY
IT'S FIT TO SAY
OH MASTER OF THE PADDIES!

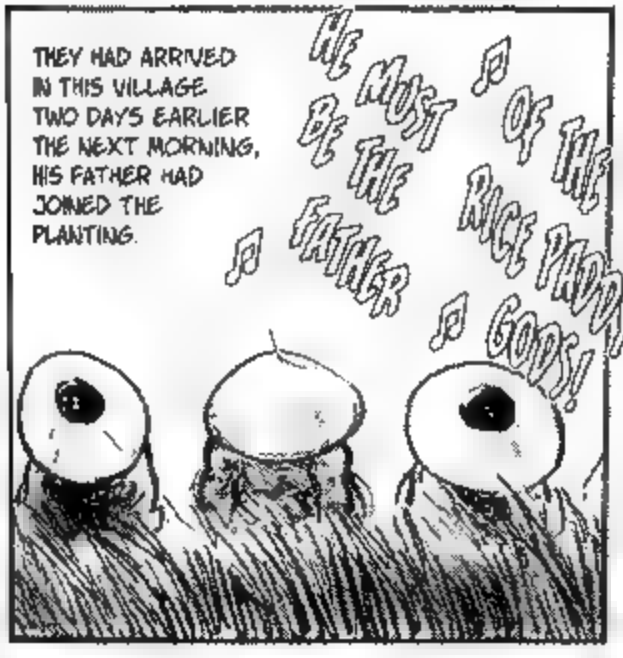

EVERYONE AT LEAST ONE TIME
JUMPS TO FULL ATTENTION!
DOWN
DOWN
DOWN
DOWN
THE FATHER THE BOY SAW NOW...
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE.
. WAS A NEW KIND OF FATHER

HIS QUICK EYES FOLLOWED EVERY MOVEMENT
EVERY MOVEMENT OF THIS NEW FATHER, AS HE WORKED BESIDE THE GIRLS IN THE FLOODED RICE PADDY;
WHY WAS HIS FATHER PLANTING RICE?
HE MIGHT HAVE WONDERED AT THIS MARVEL. BUT NO, ALL HE THOUGHT WAS HOW MUCH HE WISHED TO DO IT, TOO.
DOH DOHN DOHN DOHKO
DOHN DOHN
HE WAS A CHILD USED TO BEARING WITNESS AS HIS FATHER KILLED MEN BEYOND NUMBER.


SPLASH

BUT NEVER ONCE HAD HE WISHED HE COULD KILL.


AND NOW SOMETHING WARM WAS SWELLING IN HIS HEART, SOMETHING HE HAD NEVER FELT BEFORE.


THEY HAD ARRIVED IN THIS VILLAGE TWO DAYS EARLIER THE NEXT MORNING, HIS FATHER HAD JOINED THE PLANTING.
HE MUST BE THE FATHER OF THE RICE PADDY GODS!

AAH AH! FATHER OF THEM ALL! FATHER OF THEM ALL! FATHER OF THEM ALL!

DAIGORO NEEDED NO REASONS HE ONLY KNEW THIS MUCH—FOR HIS FATHER TO STAY IN ONE PLACE FOR LONGER THAN A SINGLE DAY .

FOR HIS FATHER TO BEND HIMSELF TO SUCH SIMPLE WORK. THESE THINGS FILLED HIS HEART WITH A LIGHTNESS HE HAD NEVER KNOWN BEFORE

DOHN DOKO DOHN

HE WAS A CHILD WITH SHISHŌGAN EYES, A DESTINY WRITTEN BENEATH STRANGE STARS, FORCED BY FATE TO WANDER WITHOUT A HOME. FOR SUCH A CHILD, THIS MOMENT BY THE RICE PADDIES, ALL SO ORDINARY, WAS A FLEETING OASIS OF PEACE

SUCH A LITTLE CUTIE!
ISN'T HE JUST!
HOW OLD ARE YOU, SWEETIE?
THREE, ARE YOU? MY, SUCH A BIG BOY!
WANT ANOTHER? THEY'RE YUMMY!

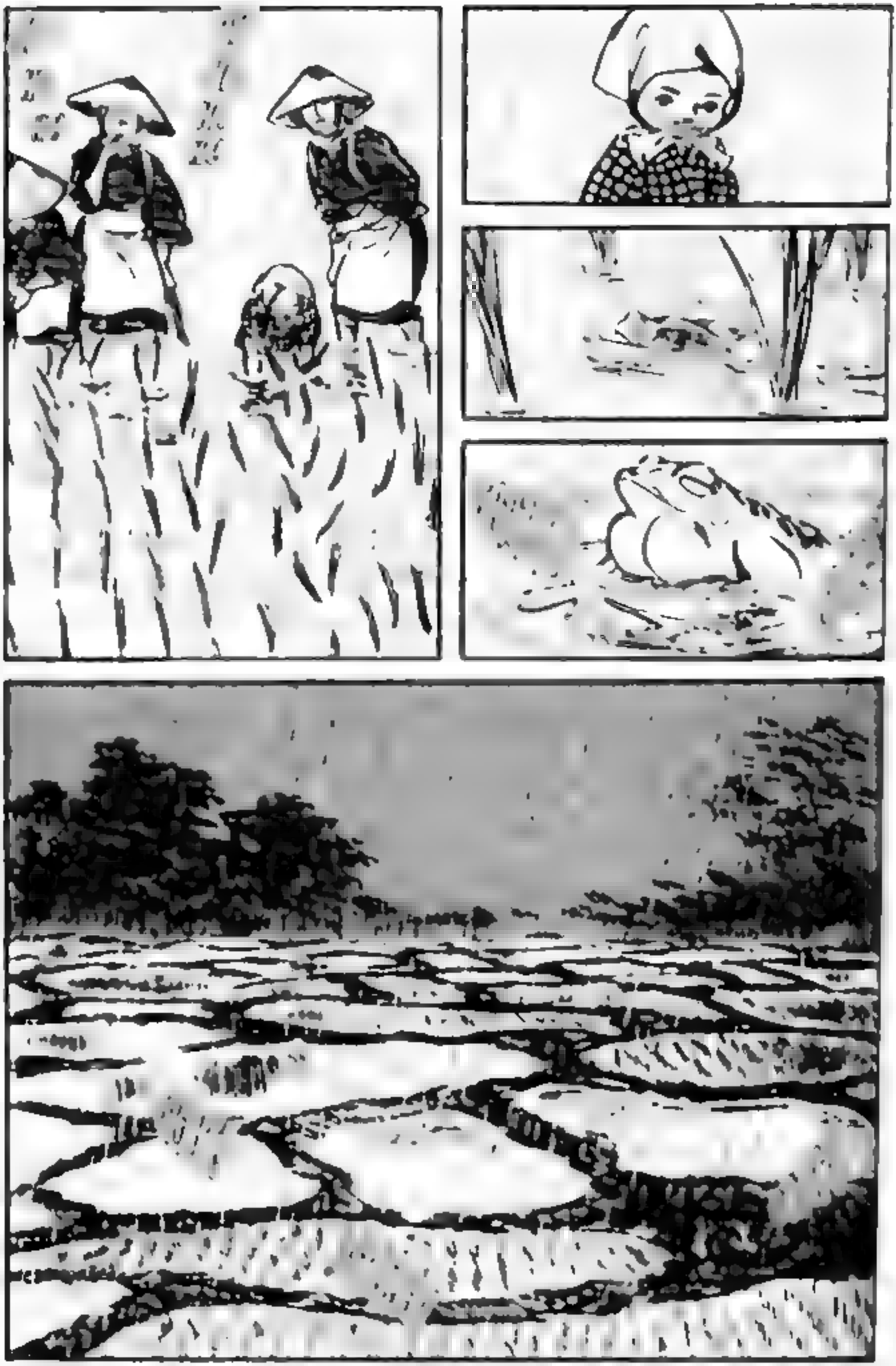
MY THANKS..
WHY ARE YOU HELPING US WITH THE PLANTING, O-SAMURAI-SAMA?
WHEN THE VILLAGE HEADMAN TOLD US, WE WAS AMAZED WE WERE.
IT'S RARER THAN THE BLACK WIND BLOWIN', IT IS.
"THE BLACK WIND"..?

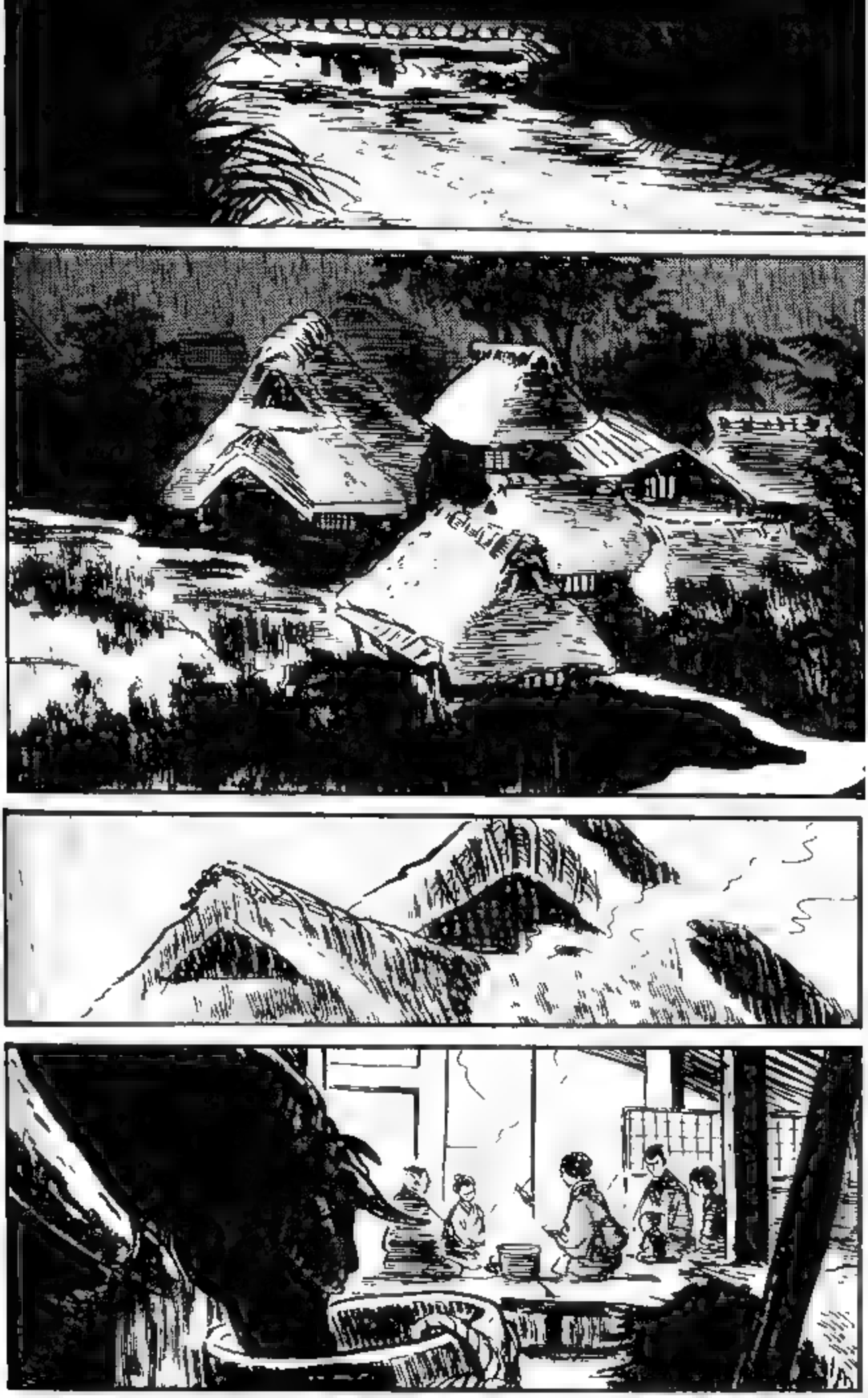
THAT'S A SOUTH WIND BLOWIN' UP DURING RAINY SEASON, SIR
! . .
A WIND OUT OF SEASON, SEE...? THEY SAY WHEN THE BLACK WIND BLOWS, YOU NEVER SEEN SO MUCH RICE!
'COURSE, IT DON'T REALLY BLOW, NOT REALLY
A BLACK WIND ..
WELL, SHALL WE GIVE IT ANOTHER GO?
THERE'S NOT ENOUGH MEN THIS YEAR, AND THAT'S A FACT WE GOTTA DO EVERY BIT OF IT ON OUR OWN.

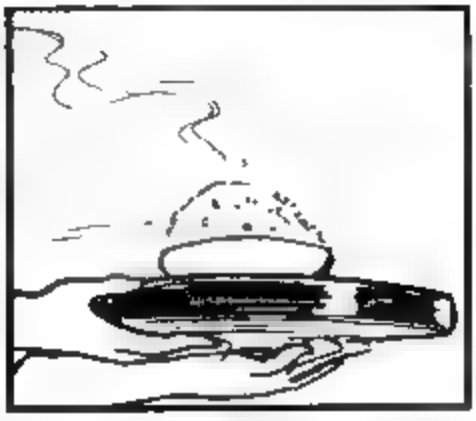
BUT IF THEY CAN FINISH THEM LEVEES, WE WON'T HAVE T'BE SUFFERIN' THE FLOODS NO MORE
TRUE ENOUGH! THEY MAY HAVE TAKEN OUR MEN THIS TIME AROUND, BUT NEXT YEAR IT'LL BE A BLESSING, IT WILL.
WHY, LORDY! WILL YOU BE HELPING US TOO, YOUNG SIR?
SPLSH
SPLSH
HERE, SWEETIE THIS'LL KEEP YOU DRY
HA HA HA!
HO HO!
HEE, HEE!

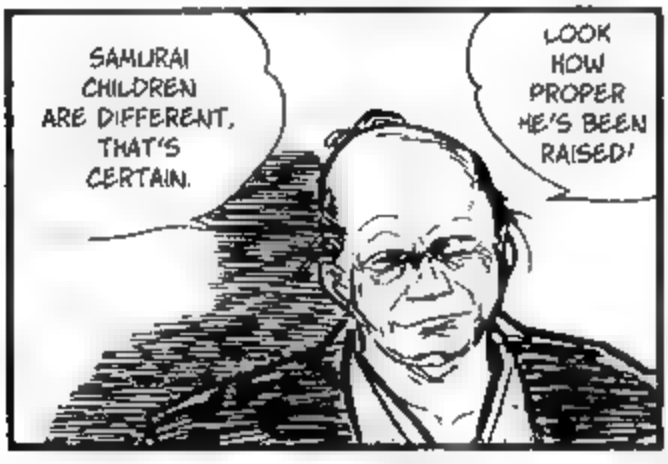
LIKE THIS, HON.
SPLRK
HO HO!
GOOD! YOU'VE GOT IT, Y'DO!

SPLRK
HO HO!
HA HA HA!





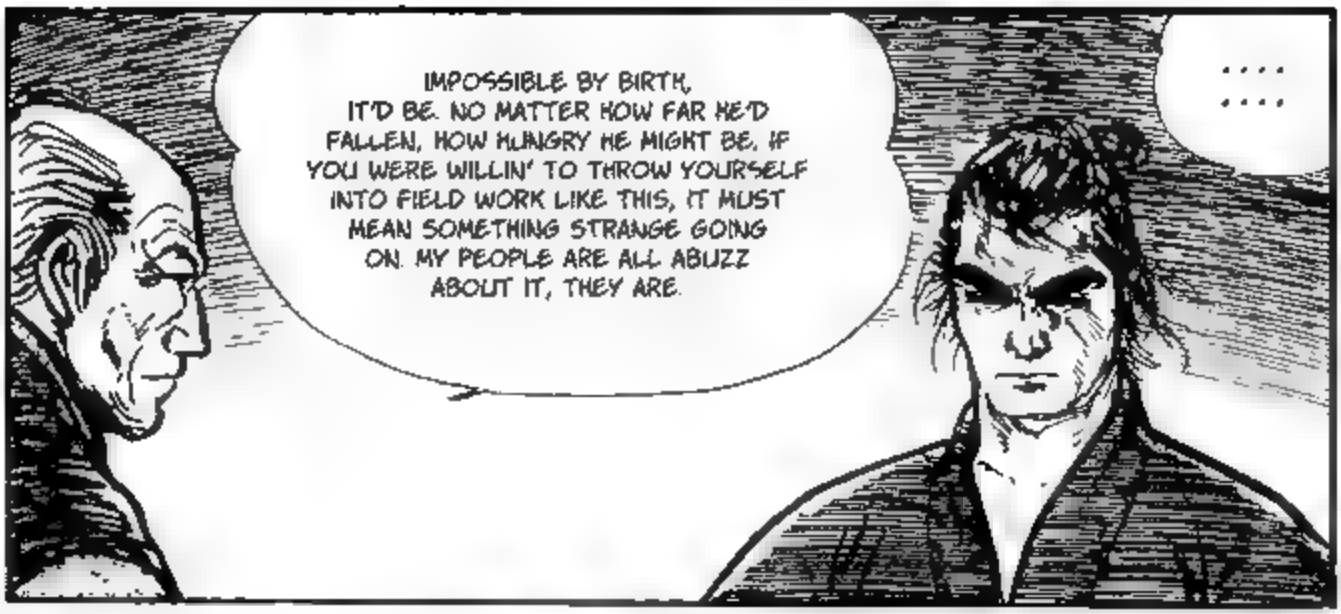



SAMURAI CHILDREN ARE DIFFERENT, THAT'S CERTAIN.
LOOK HOW PROPER HE'S BEEN RAISED!

....
....

IT'S OUR LOCAL SAKE, SIR. I DON'T KNOW IF YE'LL LIKE IT, BUT .
. TRY A SIP!
MY THANKS, BUT I DO NOT DRINK.
DO YE NOT, NOW? HMM.
BY THE WAY, SIR. HOW'S YER BONES? GOT SOME ACHES, I WAGER.
YES. . SOME.
I'D IMAGINE SO! EVEN A GENTLEMAN TRAINED IN THE ARTS OF WAR
...MIGHT DISCOVER A FEW NEW MUSCLES, WORKING THE FIELDS AND PADDIES.
INDEED
NOW...I WAS WONDERING, SIR WHY IS IT YOU'RE HELPING US PEASANTS WITH OUR WORK? WOULD YE BE WILLING TO TELL US WHY?
. . . .

WHEN YOU SHOWED UP T'OTHER NIGHT AND ASKED IF YOU COULD WORK WITH US, WELL... TO BE HONEST, I FIGURED YOU WOULDN'T LAST HALF A DAY
YOU LOOKED LIKE JUST A *RŌNIN*, SIR AND WHAT WITH YOUR BOY ONBOARD,
I THOUGHT— A BEGGIN' YOUR PARDON, SIR—YOU MUST BE AWFUL HARD UP FOR FOOD
"CAN IT BE HE'S DESPERATE ENOUGH TO TURN PEASANT?" I THOUGHT TO MYSELF
AND YET
SLRP
WATCHING YOU WORKING THESE LAST TWO DAYS, SIR...
I REALIZED I'D MADE A TERRIBLE *MISTAKE*.
NO ONE WITH *SAMURAI* BLOOD, NOT EVEN A *RŌNIN*, WOULD HELP PEASANTS IN THE FIELD.


IMPOSSIBLE BY BIRTH, IT'D BE. NO MATTER HOW FAR HE'D FALLEN, HOW HUNGRY HE MIGHT BE. IF YOU WERE WILLIN' TO THROW YOURSELF INTO FIELD WORK LIKE THIS, IT MUST MEAN SOMETHING STRANGE GOING ON. MY PEOPLE ARE ALL ABUZZ ABOUT IT, THEY ARE.
.....
.....

YOU SO UPRIGHT AND PROPER...YET EVEN WHEN YOU WENT INTO THE MUD FOR THE FIRST TIME, IT DIDN'T GIVE YOU NO PAUSE AT ALL. NO SIGN OF DISCOMFORT, LIKE.
YOU WORK SO EFFORTLESS AND NATURAL LIKE FLOWING WATER. I'VE BEEN ASTONISHED, SIR, AND THAT'S THE TRUTH.

AND IT'S NOT JUST ME. MY DAUGHTERS, MY WIFE, OLD GRANNY HERE, WE'RE ALL THE SAME.

THE OTHER VILLAGERS, TOO, I WAGER.

. . . .
. . . .

MAY I ASK YOU TO SEE US THAT WAY?

A SMALL MYSTERY?

A WANDERING *RŌNIN*, HELPING PLANT RICE FOR PEOPLE HE DOESN'T KNOW.

IS NOT THIS, IN IT'S OWN WAY, A *BLACK WIND*. ?

AND SO I DECIDED I'D BETTER ASK -

THEY SAY THAT ON SOME RARE DAY A BLACK WIND BLOWS.

WE JUST *CAN'T* FIND ANY MORE MEN! AT THIS RATE, WE'LL NEVER FINISH THE LEVEES!
IF THERE'S MORE FLOODING THIS YEAR, OUR TAX REVENUES WILL PLUNGE. THE *DAIKAN* COULD LOSE HIS POST.

BUT THERE AREN'T ANY MEN *LEFT!* WE'VE STRIPPED THE VILLAGES SO BARE THE WOMEN AND OLD FOLK ARE DOING THE PLANTING.
IT'S TRUE.. WE COMB THE COUNTRYSIDE ALL DAY WITHOUT FINDING ANY MORE LABORERS. YET IF THE PROJECT FAILS, THE CYCLE WILL NEVER END.

IT WAS HOPELESS FROM THE START! YOU CAN'T CONTROL THE KANAMASHI RIVER. THE FLOOD PLAIN'S TOO BIG.

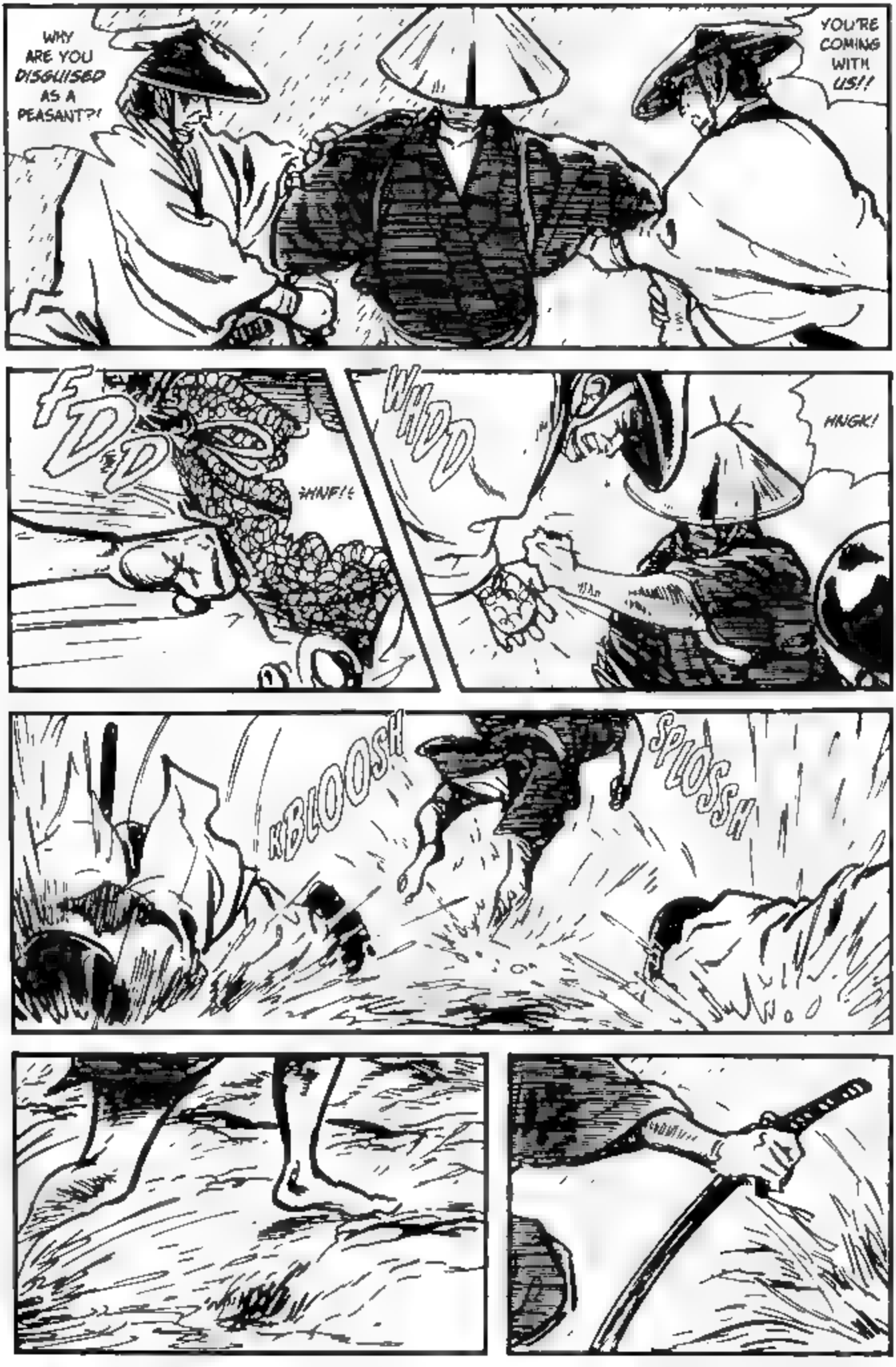
SIXTEEN LEVEES TO CHANNEL THE RIVER. IT SOUNDED GOOD ON PAPER, BUT THEY STARTED THE PROJECT BEFORE THEY'D EVEN WORKED OUT THE LOGISTICS!

NOW WE'D TAKE ANY MAN THAT CAN WALK STRAIGHT AND—
HNM?!

LOOK!
IN THAT PADDY--A MAN! A STRONG ONE, TOO!
WHERE'S HE BEEN HIDING?!
RRG!
YOU THERE! COME HERE!
HEY! CAN'T YOU HEAR ME, PEASANT?!
WE MEAN YOU!

PACK YOUR BELONG-INGS!
WE'RE IMPRESSING YOU FOR CONSTRUC-TION WORK!
I REFUSE!
WHAT?!
WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?!
REMOVE THAT HAT!! GET UP HERE!
I SAID I REFUSE!
Y-YOU CUR!
DON'T YOU KNOW WE'RE FROM THE KANAMASHI DAIKANSHO?!
WHAT INSOLENCE!
UNFORGIV-ABLE!!

SPISSH
SPISSH
HALT!!
CAN'T YOU SEE WHAT YOU CRUSH BENEATH YOUR FEET?!
MORE AND MORE SUSPICIOUS!
WHO ARE YOU?!


WHY ARE YOU DISGUISED AS A PEASANT?!
YOU'RE COMING WITH US!!
FWD
SHNF!
WHD
HNGK!
KBLOOSH
SPLOSSH

EEEEK!!
SPISSH
SPISSH
SPISSH

THE WARMTH HAD DRAINED FROM THE BOY'S YOUNG HEART

HIS *SHISHŌGAN* WIDE OPEN, HIS HEART IN AN INSTANT STOOD BESIDE HIS FATHER'S IN *MEIFUMADŌ*.

A CHILD OF DESTINY, RESPONDING ALL TOO EASILY TO THE WAVES OF BLOODLUST TURNED AGAINST THEM.

YOU DRAW YOUR *SWORD?!*

PROVOC-ATEUR!

A STARVING DOG *DARES* BARE HIS TEETH AT THE *DAIKANSHO?!*

KILL HIM! *CUT HIM DOWN!*

HYAAA!

WHSSHT

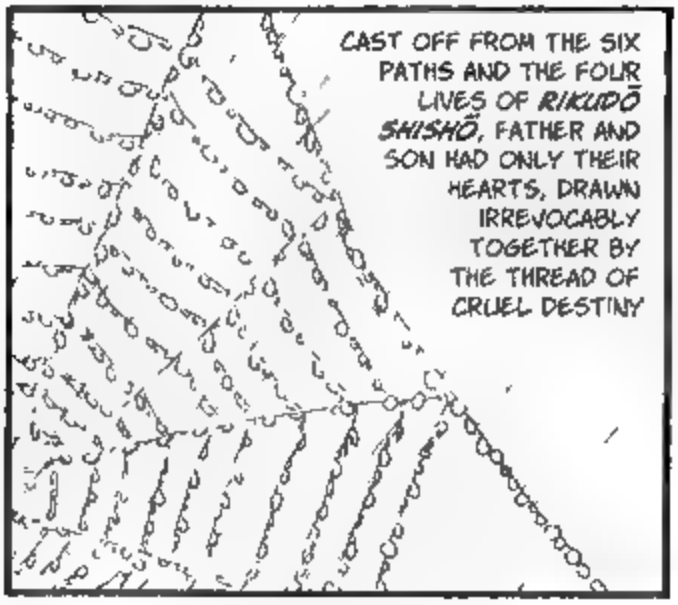
KLANNG
SPANNG
FWTT

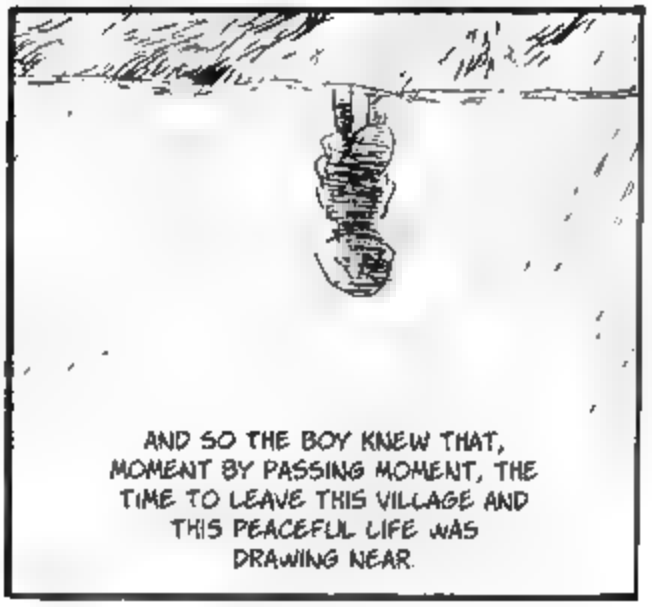
RYAAAA!
HYAAAA!
FWHIT
KANNG
SPANNG
SPLIT

NOW
GO!!

SHKK
HIS FATHER HAD RETURNED TO THE PLANTING BUT PEACE WOULD NOT RETURN TO THIS BOY'S HEART

NAKED BLADE CROSSED NAKED BLADE. AS ALWAYS, HIS FATHER WON.
BUT THE BOY KNEW WHAT WOULD COME NEXT


CAST OFF FROM THE SIX PATHS AND THE FOUR LIVES OF *RIKUDŌ SHISHŌ*, FATHER AND SON HAD ONLY THEIR HEARTS, DRAWN IRREVOCABLY TOGETHER BY THE THREAD OF CRUEL DESTINY


AND SO THE BOY KNEW THAT, MOMENT BY PASSING MOMENT, THE TIME TO LEAVE THIS VILLAGE AND THIS PEACEFUL LIFE WAS DRAWING NEAR.

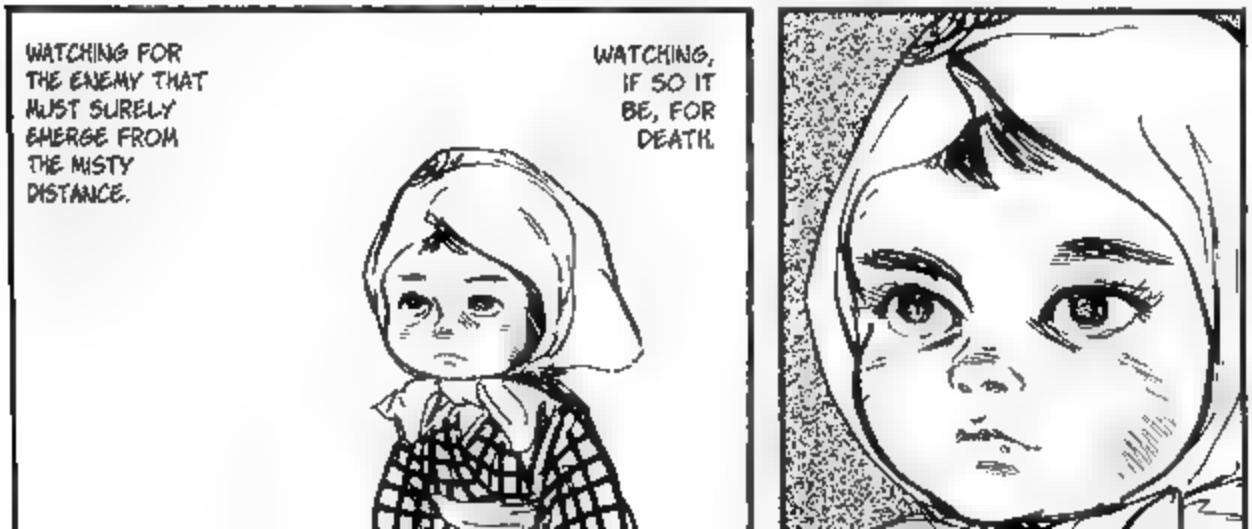
shahh
shahh
O-SAMURAI-SAMA!!

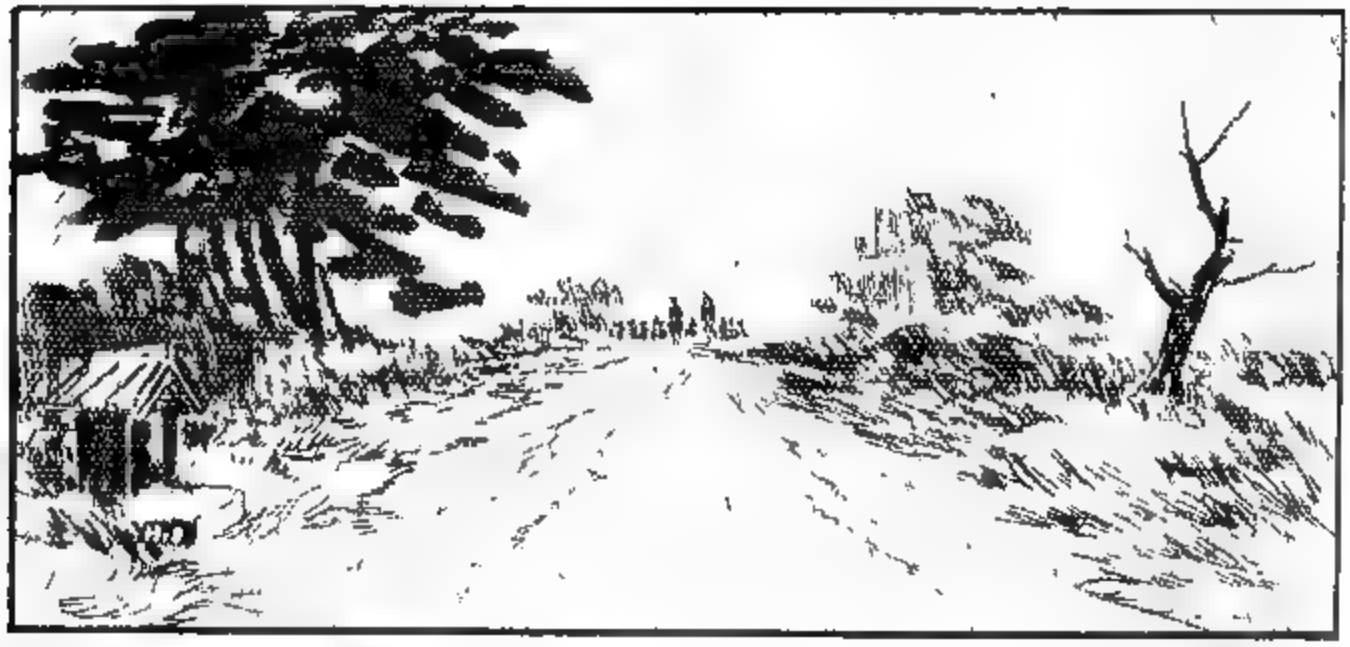
O-SAMURAI-SAMA!!

OH, LORD!! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!
IT DOES NOT CONCERN YOU.
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS NEXT, IT IS ONLY A BLACK WIND.
FROM WHENCE IT CAME, WHITHER IT BLOWS.
.IT IS FOREVER BEYOND THE KEN OF MEN.

B-BUT ..YOU MUST *FLEE!* THE *DAIKANSHO'S* MEN WILL BE COMING FOR YOU!
THINK OF YOUR *CHILD*, SIR! THERE'S NOT A MOMENT TO LOSE! HERE--IT'S NOT MUCH, I KNOW, BUT.. SOME RICE, AND SOME SMALL MONEY FOR THE ROAD.
MY THANKS. I WILL ACCEPT THE KINDNESS, IF NOT THE GIFT
YET ,I ASK YOU TO LET ME WORK UNTIL THESE SHOOTS ARE PLANTED.
THAT IS WHAT I CAME TO DO!
IT MAY SEEM STRANGE TO YOU, YET FATHER AND SON TOGETHER, WE ENTRUST OUR LIVES TO THIS HANDFUL OF SHOOTS.
YOUR *LIVES..?*

THE BOY DID NOT MOVE, HIS EYES FIXED STEADILY UPON THE RAIN-SHROUDED ROAD


WATCHING FOR THE ENEMY THAT MUST SURELY EMERGE FROM THE MISTY DISTANCE.
WATCHING, IF SO IT BE, FOR DEATH.



THD
THD
THD

THD
THD

THERE HE IS! THAT'S HIM!
STOP HIM!
BE CAREFUL! HE'S DANGEROUS!
FALL BACK!!

I AM HARADA WAEMON, DAIKAN OF THE KANAMASHI DISTRICT!
I AM TOLD YOU REFUSE IMPRESSMENT FOR FLOOD-CONTROL LABOR, AND PRESUME TO TAKE ARMS AGAINST MY MEN! IS THIS TRUE?!
I AM NOT FROM THIS DISTRICT I JOIN IN THE PLANTING AS PART OF A SWORN QUEST
BEING RESOLVED TO FULFILL MY QUEST AT RISK OF DEATH, I REFUSED SERVICE, AND TOOK ARMS TO DEFEND MYSELF
WHA--?! HOW DARE A MAN OF SAMURAI BLOOD STOOP TO PLANTING RICE?! THE MOST WRETCHED RŌNIN WOULD HAVE MORE PRIDE!
A SWORN QUEST AT RISK OF DEATH .?! ABSURD!
IT IS NOT SOMETHING ANOTHER WOULD UNDERSTAND I ASK ONLY THAT YOU LET ME BE.

I CANNOT, AND I SHALL NOT! THE DISTRICT NEEDS LABOR FOR FLOOD RELIEF! WE ARE ROUNDING UP EVERY ABLE-BODIED MAN WE CAN FIND!
DO YOU DENY YOU ARE A RŌNIN, NO FIXED ABODE? IF YOU CAN STOOP IN THE PADDIES LIKE A PEASANT, THEN YOU CAN WORK ON THE LEVEES! WE'LL DRAG YOU IN BY FORCE IF I HAVE TO!
YET I REFUSE!
WHA —?!
NO!! WAIT!

YOU OFFER NO NAME.
FOR ME TO DO SO WOULD CAUSE YOU DIFFICULTY
BEST TO THINK OF ME AS A PASSING RŌNIN, NO MORE.
I DON'T CARE! FROM YOUR CARRIAGE AND THE SET OF YOUR EYES, I CAN SEE YOU ARE NO ORDINARY MAN!
I AM ICHIGE JIHEITA, YOKO-METSUKE OF THE KANAMASHI DISTRICT
FORMER KŌGI KAISHA-KUNIN ŌGAMI ITTŌ!

O. ŌGAMI ITTŌ?!
WHAT NOW?! KILL ME, AND THE YAGYŪ WILL EMBRACE YOU. YOUR ADVANCEMENT WILL BE ASSURED!
BUT DO NOTHING UPON HEARING MY NAME..
AND YOUR VERY HONOR WILL BE AT STAKE.
YES..YES, AND YET ..TO FACE YOUR SHIŌ-RYŪ... SWORDWORK THAT EVEN THE YAGYŪ CANNOT DEFEAT
THE CHANCES OF VICTORY ARE. ARE. RANG!

!!

ICHIGE, NO! THIS IS MADNESS!

WE LIVE BY THE SWORD!! WHO WOULDN'T WANT TO PROVE THEMSELVES THE STRONGEST OF THEIR GENERATION?!

I COULD NOT PRAY FOR A BETTER OPPORTUNITY

STOP! DON'T DO IT!! DON'T BE SWEPT AWAY BY FOOLISH AMBITION, ICHIGE!

I HAVE SOME SKILL IN NEN-RYŪ

..AND ŌGAKI ITTŌ IS AN OPPONENT BEYOND REPROACH!

FWAPP

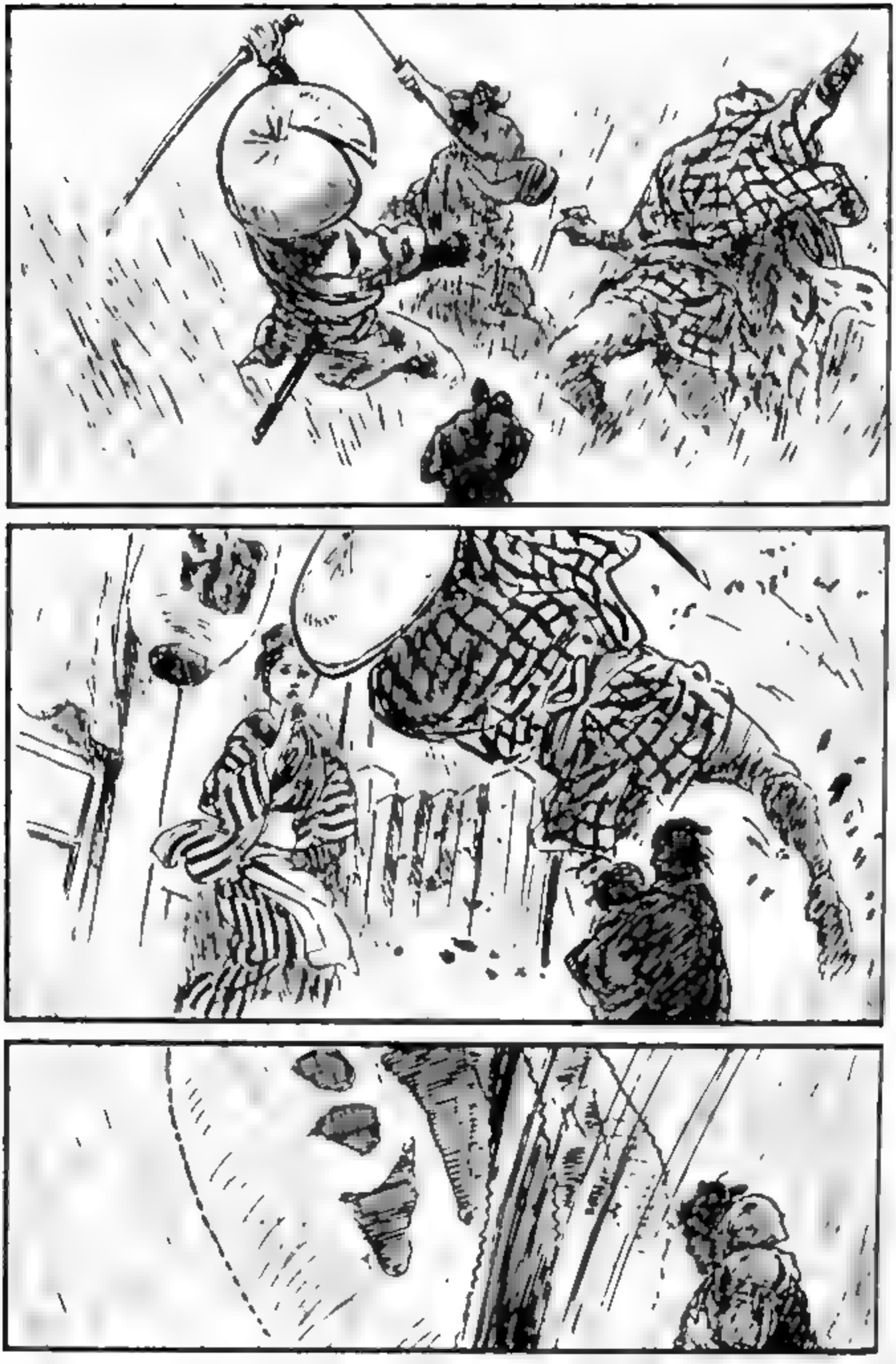
SHINGG

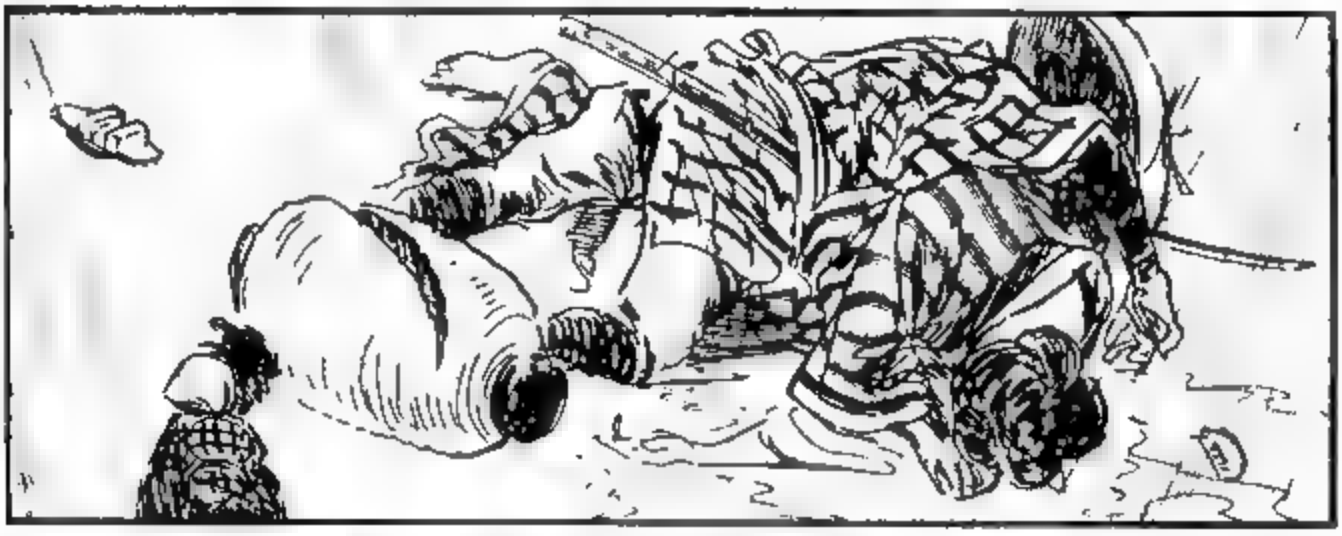
READY!!

SO BE IT.

HYAAA-
AAH?!
HUH!!
D-DAMN!
AH...
NNG.

SHKK
WE, WE SAW NOBODY!
THAT MONSTER ŌGAMI ITTŌ NEVER CAME TO OUR DISTRICT! NEVER! ALL OF YOU— DO YOU UNDERSTAND?!





IT ..IT'S PLANTING TIME..I...I CAN ALMOST HEAR IT... THE PLANTING SONG I WISH I COULD BE THERE ONE LAST T-TIME

ŌGAMI HAD LIVED TRUE TO HIS ASSASSIN'S ROAD, AND SO AN INNOCENT GIRL HAD DIED.
THE HEARTLESS END TO A LIFE TOO FULL OF TRAGEDY, A CHILD SOLD TO THE PROCURERS BY IMPOVERISHED PARENTS. YET WITH HER DYING BREATH, SHE STILL LONGED FOR HOME.

UNKNOWN TO ALL, ITTŌ HAD PLANTED STRANDS OF THE YOUNG WOMAN'S HAIR WITH EACH SHOOT OF RICE.
UNKNOWN TO ALL...
WHY HAD HE COME TO THIS SMALL VILLAGE? NONE THERE WOULD EVER KNOW.
ANYMORE THAN WHY THE BLACK WIND BLOWS...

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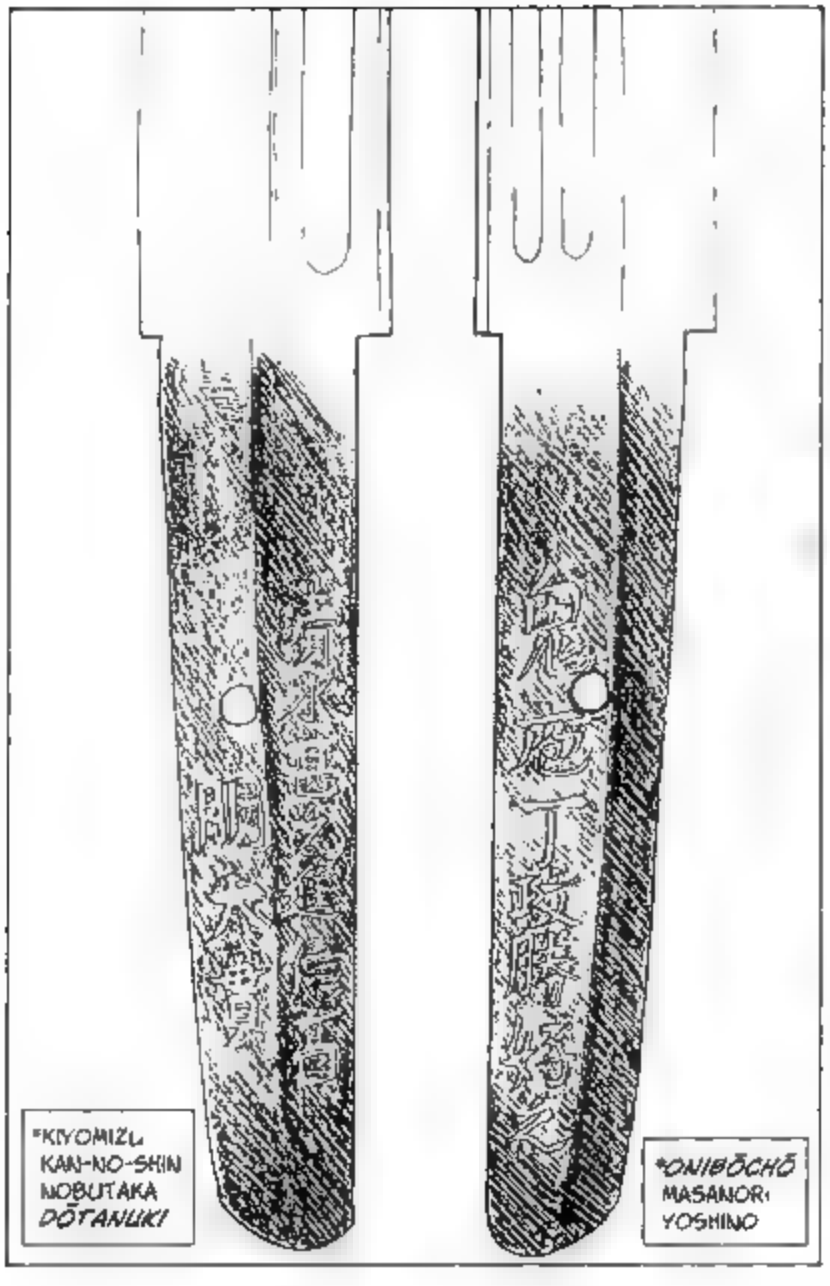
the twenty-seventh

Decapitate Asaemon



YAMADA ASAEMON

THE FIRST, SADATOKI. DIED DECEMBER 18, THE FIRST YEAR OF *KYŌHŌ*, 1716

THE SECOND YOSHITOKI. DIED APRIL 19, THE FIRST YEAR OF *ENKYŌ*, 1744

THE THIRD, YOSHITSUGU. DIED MAY 22, THE SEVENTH YEAR OF MEIWA, 1770.

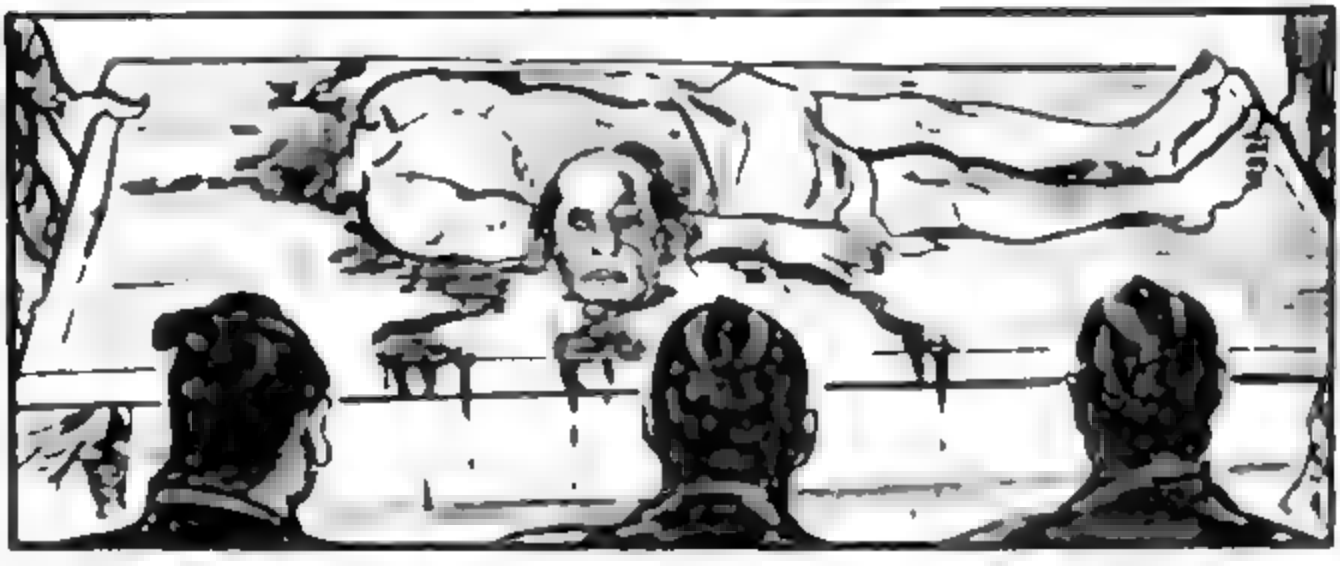
THE FOURTH, YOSHITOMO. DIED SEPTEMEBER 17, THE FIRST YEAR OF *TENMEI*, 1786.

THE FIFTH, YOSHIMUTSU. DIED FEBRUARY 9, THE SIXTH YEAR OF *BUNSEI*, 1823.

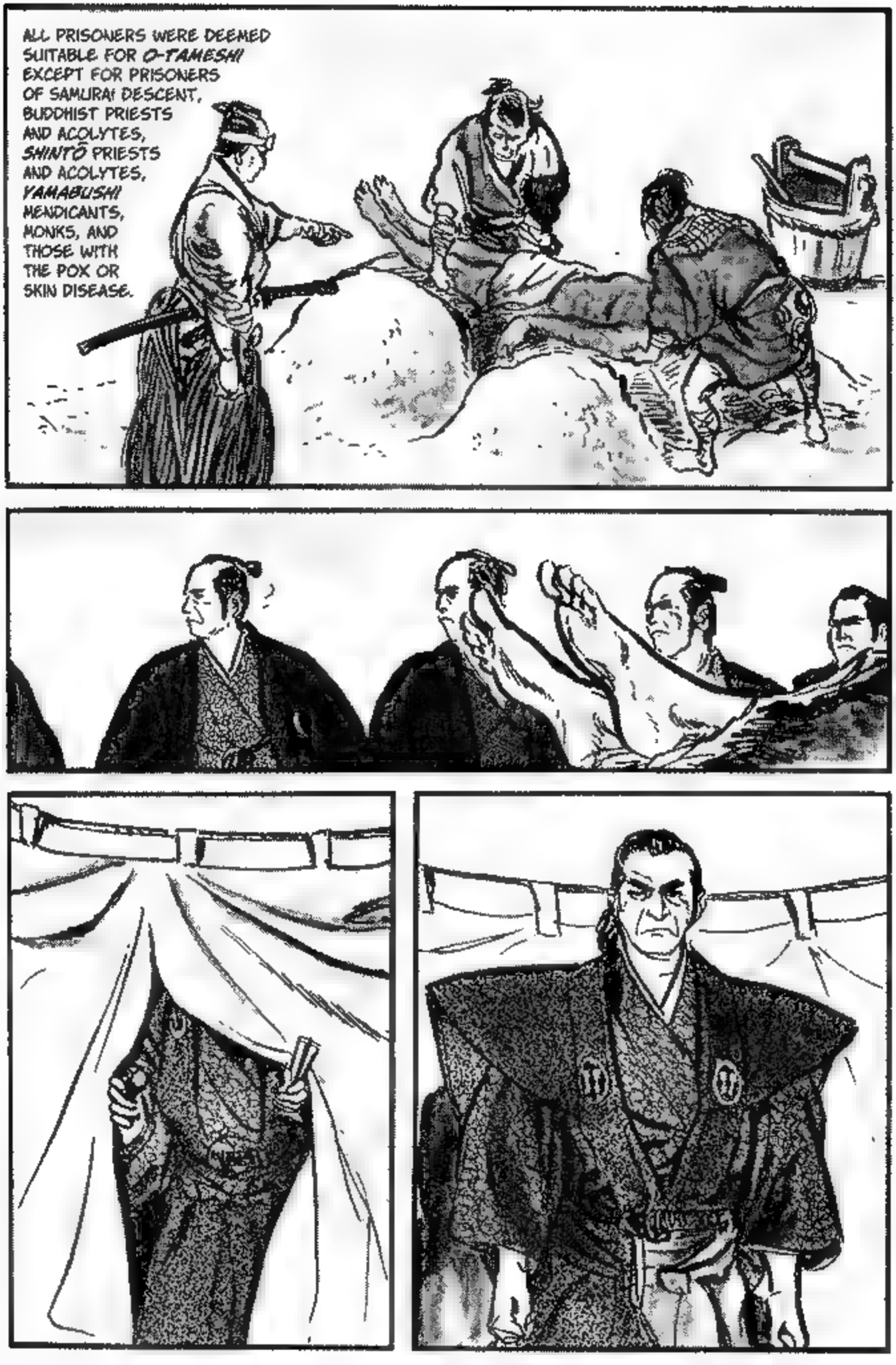
THE SIXTH, YOSHIMASA. DIED JUNE 17, THE FIFTH YEAR OF *KAEI*, 1852.

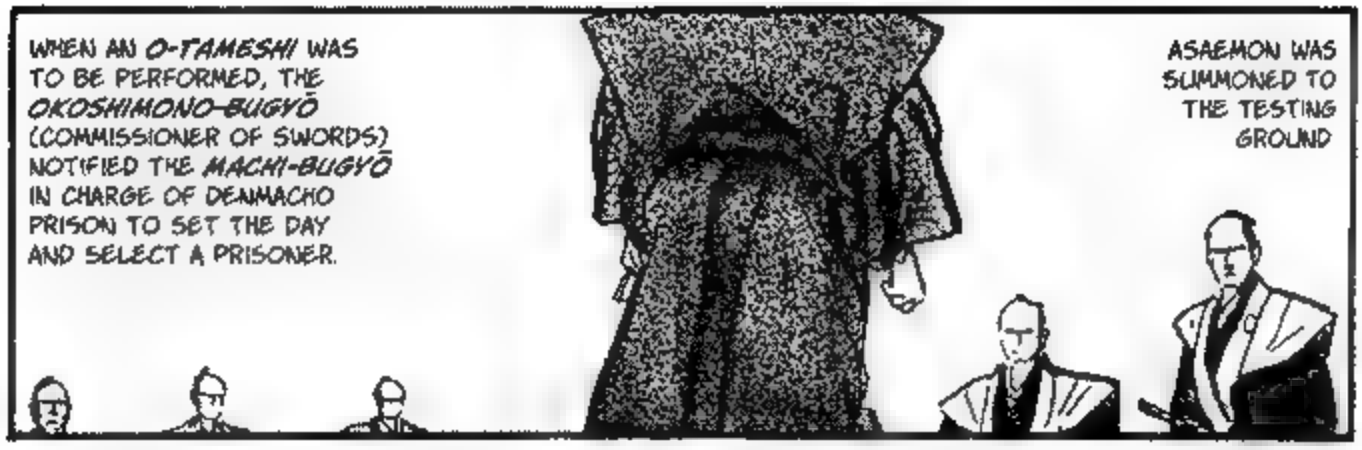
THE SEVENTH, YOSHITOSHI. DIED DECEMBER 29, THE SEVENTEENTH YEAR OF *MEIJI*, 1882

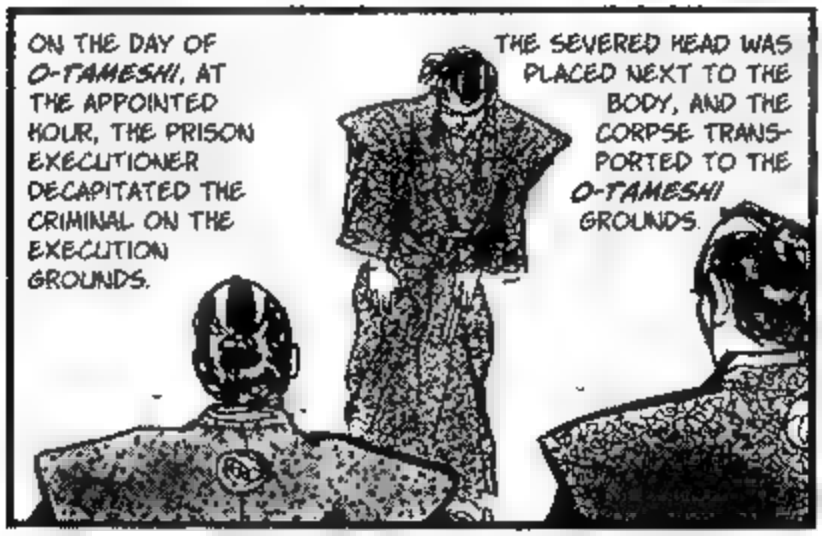
THE TESTING OF THE CUTTING EDGE OF THE SHŌGUN'S *SASHIRYŌ* SWORD WAS KNOWN AS *O-TAMESHI* FOR GENERATIONS, THE POST OF *KIRI-YAKU*, THE OFFICIAL ENTRUSTED WITH MAKING THE TEST CUT, WAS HELD BY *YAMADA ASAEMON*...



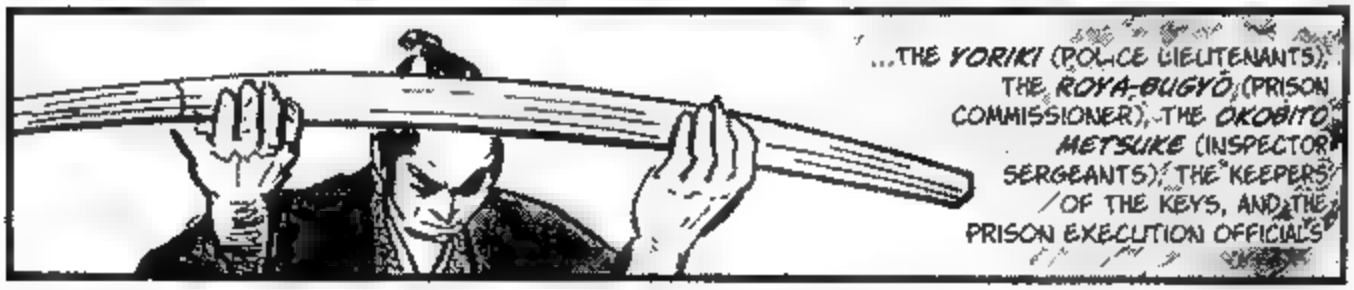
Death Penalty:
The head shall be severed from the body, and the corpse used for o-tameshi.
- The O-Sadamegaki,
Article One Hundred.

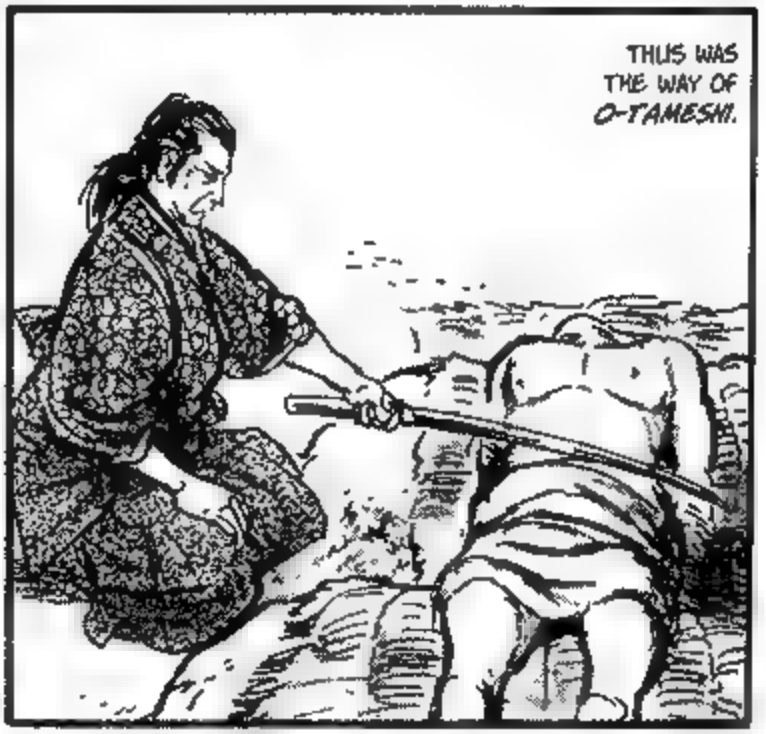

ALL PRISONERS WERE DEEMED SUITABLE FOR O-TAMESHI EXCEPT FOR PRISONERS OF SAMURAI DESCENT, BUDDHIST PRIESTS AND ACOLYTES, SHINTŌ PRIESTS AND ACOLYTES, YAMABUSHI MENDICANTS, MONKS, AND THOSE WITH THE POX OR SKIN DISEASE.


WHEN AN O-TAMESHI WAS TO BE PERFORMED, THE OKOSHIMONO-BUGYŌ (COMMISSIONER OF SWORDS) NOTIFIED THE MACHI-BUGYŌ IN CHARGE OF DEANMACHO PRISON TO SET THE DAY AND SELECT A PRISONER.
ASAEMON WAS SUMMONED TO THE TESTING GROUND

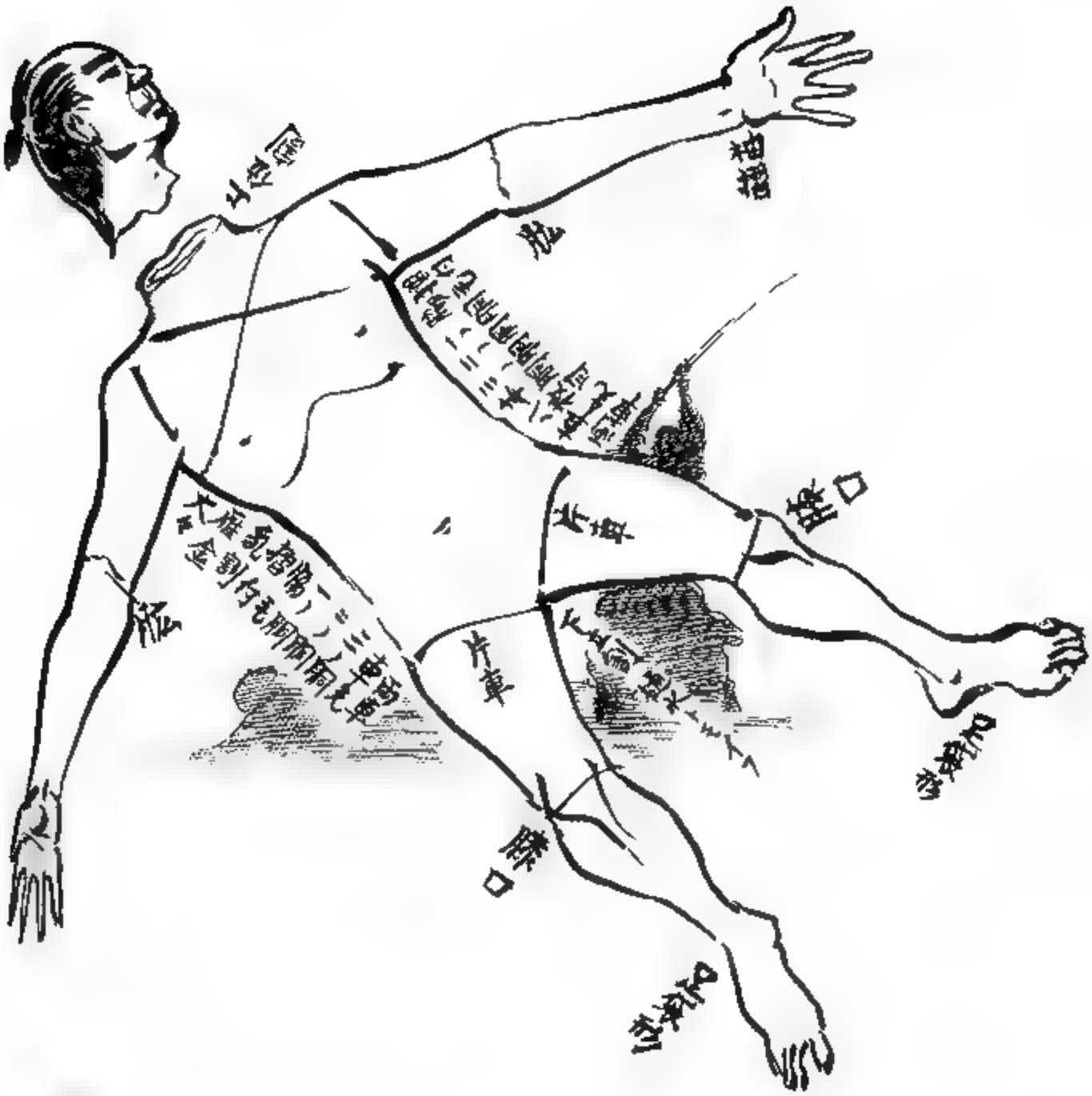

ON THE DAY OF O-TAMESHI, AT THE APPOINTED HOUR, THE PRISON EXECUTIONER DECAPITATED THE CRIMINAL ON THE EXECUTION GROUNDS.
THE SEVERED HEAD WAS PLACED NEXT TO THE BODY, AND THE CORPSE TRANSPORTED TO THE O-TAMESHI GROUNDS.

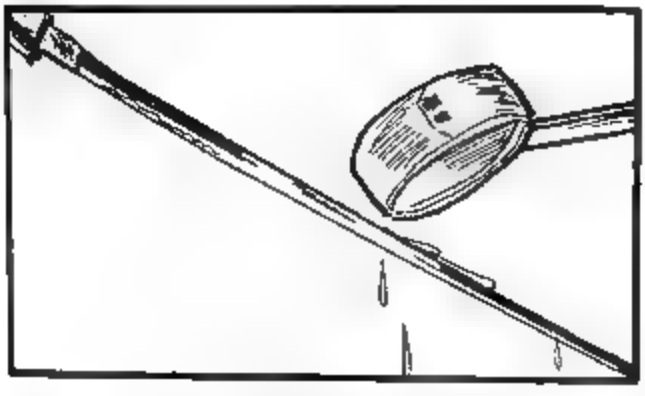
IN ATTENDANCE AT THE TESTING GROUND WERE THE OKOSHIMONO-BUGYŌ AND HIS AIDES, THE OKACHI METSUKE (PALACE GUARD INSPECTOR), THE HONAMI (SWORD APPRAISER), THE PRISON GUARDS...

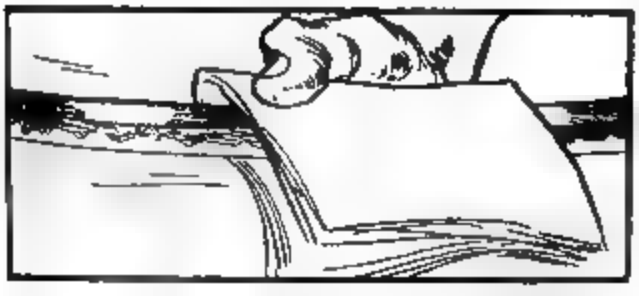

...THE YORIKI (POLICE LIEUTENANTS), THE ROYA-BUGYŌ (PRISON COMMISSIONER), THE OKOBITO METSUKE (INSPECTOR SERGEANTS), THE KEEPERS OF THE KEYS, AND THE PRISON EXECUTION OFFICIALS

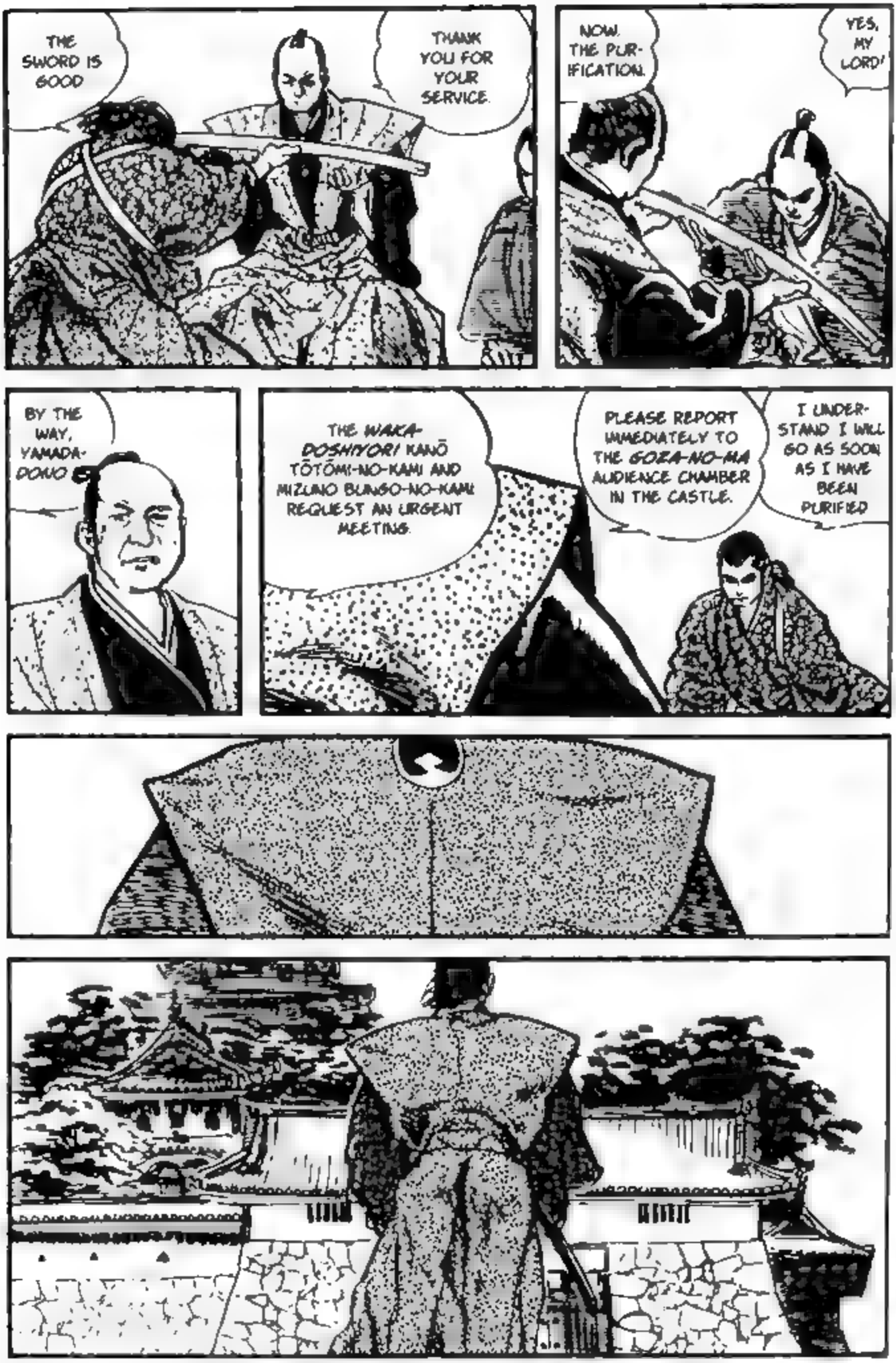

THUS WAS THE WAY OF O-TAMESHI.

MWAHAHA!


肩井
曲池
手三里
合谷
足三里
陽陵泉
三陰交
太衝

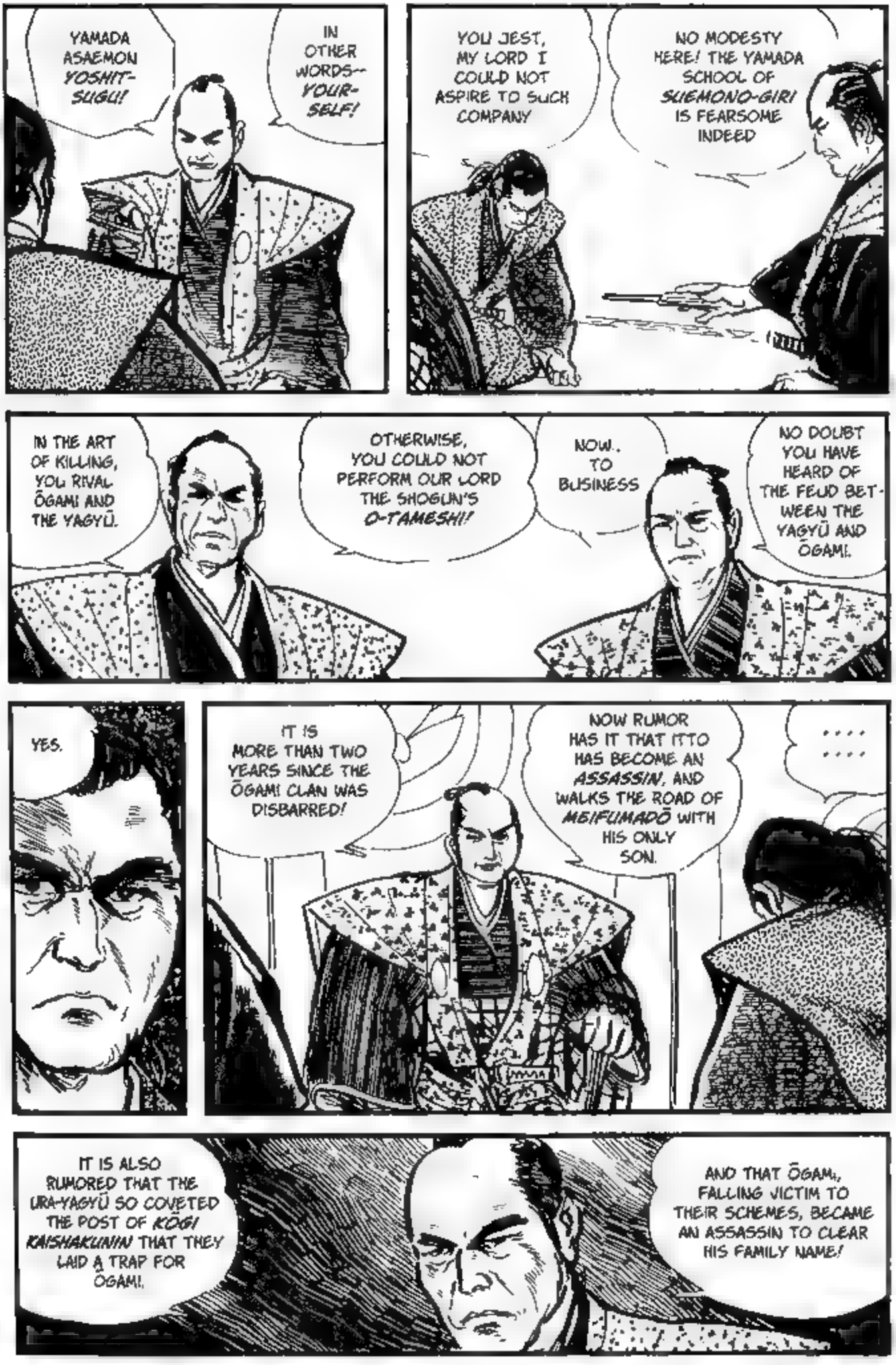





THE SWORD IS GOOD
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE.
NOW, THE PURIFICATION.
YES, MY LORD!
BY THE WAY, YAMADA-DONO
THE WAKA-DOSHIYORI KANŌ TŌTŌMI-NO-KAMI AND MIZUNO BUNGO-NO-KAMI REQUEST AN URGENT MEETING.
PLEASE REPORT IMMEDIATELY TO THE GOZA-NO-MA AUDIENCE CHAMBER IN THE CASTLE.
I UNDERSTAND I WILL GO AS SOON AS I HAVE BEEN PURIFIED

APPROACH!
MY LORDS!
SUSK SUSK
I POSE A QUESTION. WHO IS THE FOREMOST HITO-KIRI OF THE AGE?

MY LORD, I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION.
WHAT IS *NITO-KIRI*?!
TO CUT A MAN WITH A SWORD! IN SHORT, HE WHO IS MOST ACCOMPLISHED AT KILLING HUMAN BEINGS.
NO MATTER HOW TALENTED WITH BAMBOO OR WOODEN PRACTICE SWORDS, IT MUST TAKE A DIFFERENT SKILL TO KILL A LIVING PERSON. WE ASK WHO IS THE PREMIER FIGHTER OF THE AGE WITH A *NAKED BLADE!*
. . . .
. . . .
YOU MAY SPEAK FREELY, WITHOUT FEAR.
MY LORD!
THEN..FIRST, THE MEN OF THE *YAGYŪ* CLAN. MOST PARTICULARLY, RETSUDŌ-SAMA OF THE *URA-YAGYŪ*.
HMM..
AND.. THE FORMER *KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN*, ŌGAMI ITTŌ OF THE *SUIŌ* SCHOOL.
THESE TWO WOULD I CHOOSE...
MM!
YET.. YOU OMIT ANOTHER.
. . . .
. . . .

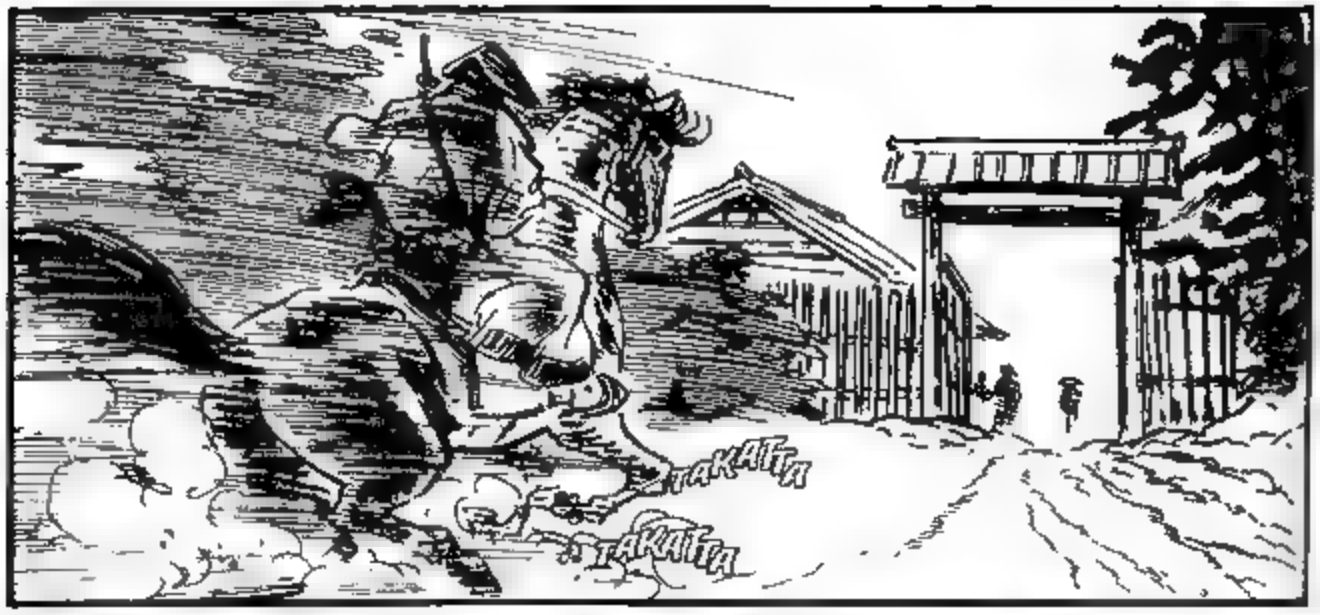

YAMADA ASAEMON YOSHITSUGU!
IN OTHER WORDS--YOURSELF!
YOU JEST, MY LORD I COULD NOT ASPIRE TO SUCH COMPANY
NO MODESTY HERE! THE YAMADA SCHOOL OF SUEMONO-GIRI IS FEARSOME INDEED
IN THE ART OF KILLING, YOU RIVAL ŌGAMI AND THE YAGYŪ.
OTHERWISE, YOU COULD NOT PERFORM OUR LORD THE SHOGUN'S O-TAMESHI!
NOW.. TO BUSINESS
NO DOUBT YOU HAVE HEARD OF THE FEUD BETWEEN THE YAGYŪ AND ŌGAMI.
YES.
IT IS MORE THAN TWO YEARS SINCE THE ŌGAMI CLAN WAS DISBARRED!
NOW RUMOR HAS IT THAT ITTO HAS BECOME AN ASSASSIN, AND WALKS THE ROAD OF MEIFUMADŌ WITH HIS ONLY SON.
. . . . . .
IT IS ALSO RUMORED THAT THE URA-YAGYŪ SO COVETED THE POST OF KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN THAT THEY LAID A TRAP FOR ŌGAMI.
AND THAT ŌGAMI, FALLING VICTIM TO THEIR SCHEMES, BECAME AN ASSASSIN TO CLEAR HIS FAMILY NAME!

GOSSIP RUNS RAMPANT, AND ECHOES IN THE HALLS OF THE SHOGUNATE ITSELF. IF THESE RUMORS SHOULD PROVE TRUE, THEY CANNOT BE IGNORED. THE YAGYU SERVE AS SŌ-METSUKE IF THEY DEFY OUR LORD'S WILL AS THEY PLEASE, THEY MUST BE PUNISHED!
. . .
. . . .
MOREOVER, FOR ONE WHO ONCE SERVED AS KŌGI KAISHAKUNIN TO BECOME AN ASSASSIN, KILLING FOR MONEY, IS EQUALLY INTOLERABLE! IT MARS THE NAME OF THE SHŌGUN HIMSELF! HE MUST BE DISPOSED OF, IN STRICTEST SECRECY
ASAEMON! SEEK OUT THE TRUTH OF THIS MATTER AND WHEN YOU HAVE FOUND IT— KILL ŌGAMI ITTŌ!
. . . .
. . . .
WE SHALL INVESTIGATE THE YAGYŪ.
WHY ENTRUST THIS WEIGHTY TASK TO ONE SUCH AS ME. ?
IF RUMORS ARE TRUE, THE YAGYŪ WILL NOT BE STANDING IDLY BY!
THE TRUTH WOULD DESTROY THEIR CLAN!

THERE IS NO OTHER MAN ALIVE WHO CAN FACE BOTH THE ASSASSIN SWORDS OF THE YAGYŪ AND THE EXECUTIONER'S SWORD OF ŌGAMI ITTŌ!
AND MOREOVER—ŌGAMI ITTŌ WAS ONCE KAISHAKUNIN SEVERING THE HEADS OF LIVING MEN! YOU, TOO HAVE DONE THIS! YOU ARE OF DIFFERENT RANK, YET THERE MAY BE AN UNDERSTANDING, DECAPITATOR TO DECAPITATOR!
ACCORDING TO THE O-NAWABARI ŌGAMI ITTŌ TRAVELS SOUTH ALONG THE SANIŌDŌ BYWAY
RIDE LIKE THE WIND! YOU WILL OVERTAKE HIM IN TEN DAYS OR LESS
AND BEWARE OF THE YAGYŪ!
MY LORDS...!

TAKATA TAKATA TAKATA

TAKATA KTOK KTOK KTOK


TAKATTA
TAKATTA

*KŌGI GO-YŌ
公儀御用

I RIDE ON THE SHŌGUN'S BUSINESS! LET ME PASS!

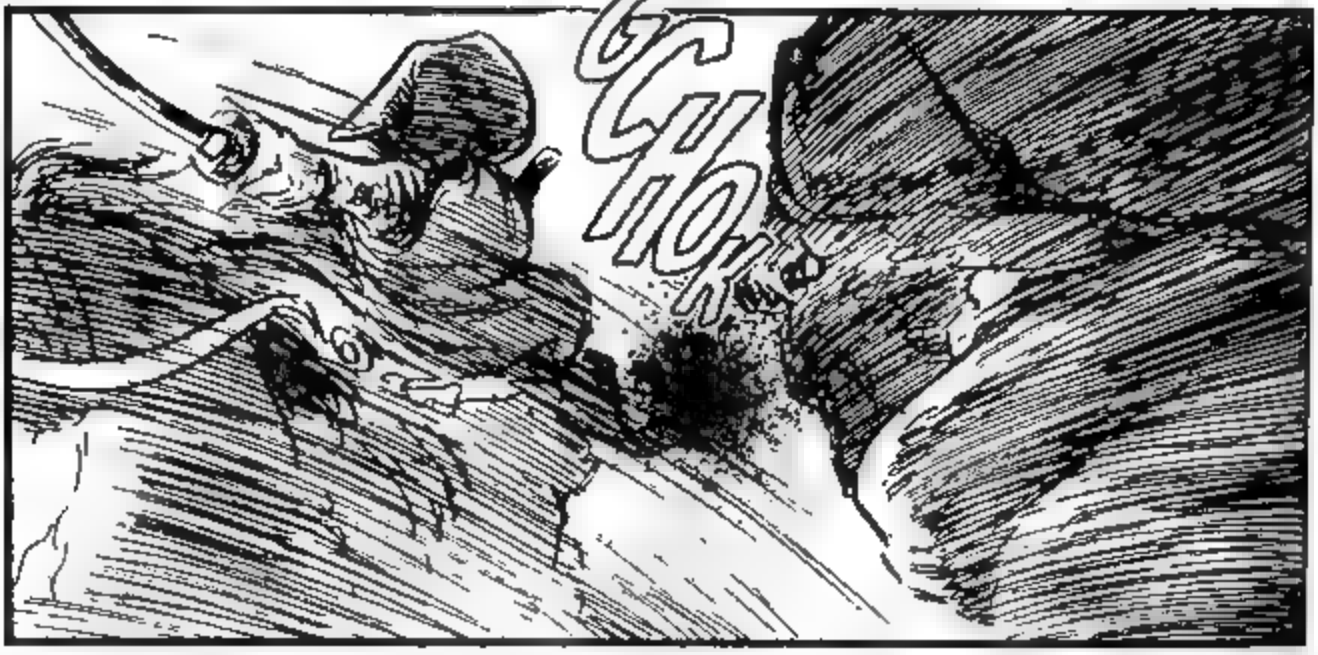
KWHOO
KWHOO
KWHOO
IT'S YAMADA-SAMA! THE MAN THEY WARNED US ABOUT!
ASAEMON THE DECAPITATOR?!

DASH

SPLSSH
SPLSSH

SKRSSH
SKRSSH

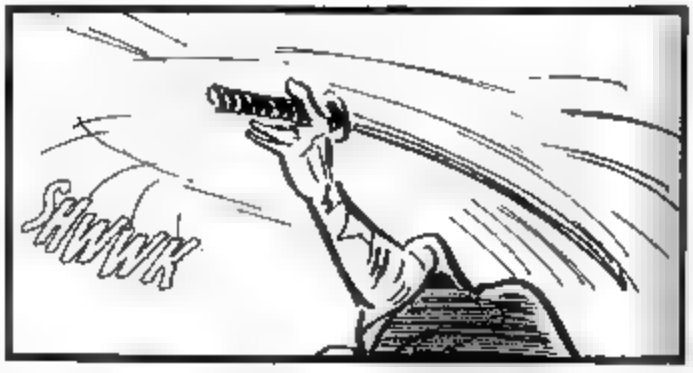
URA-
YAGYŪ
...?!


GHOK

WHOK

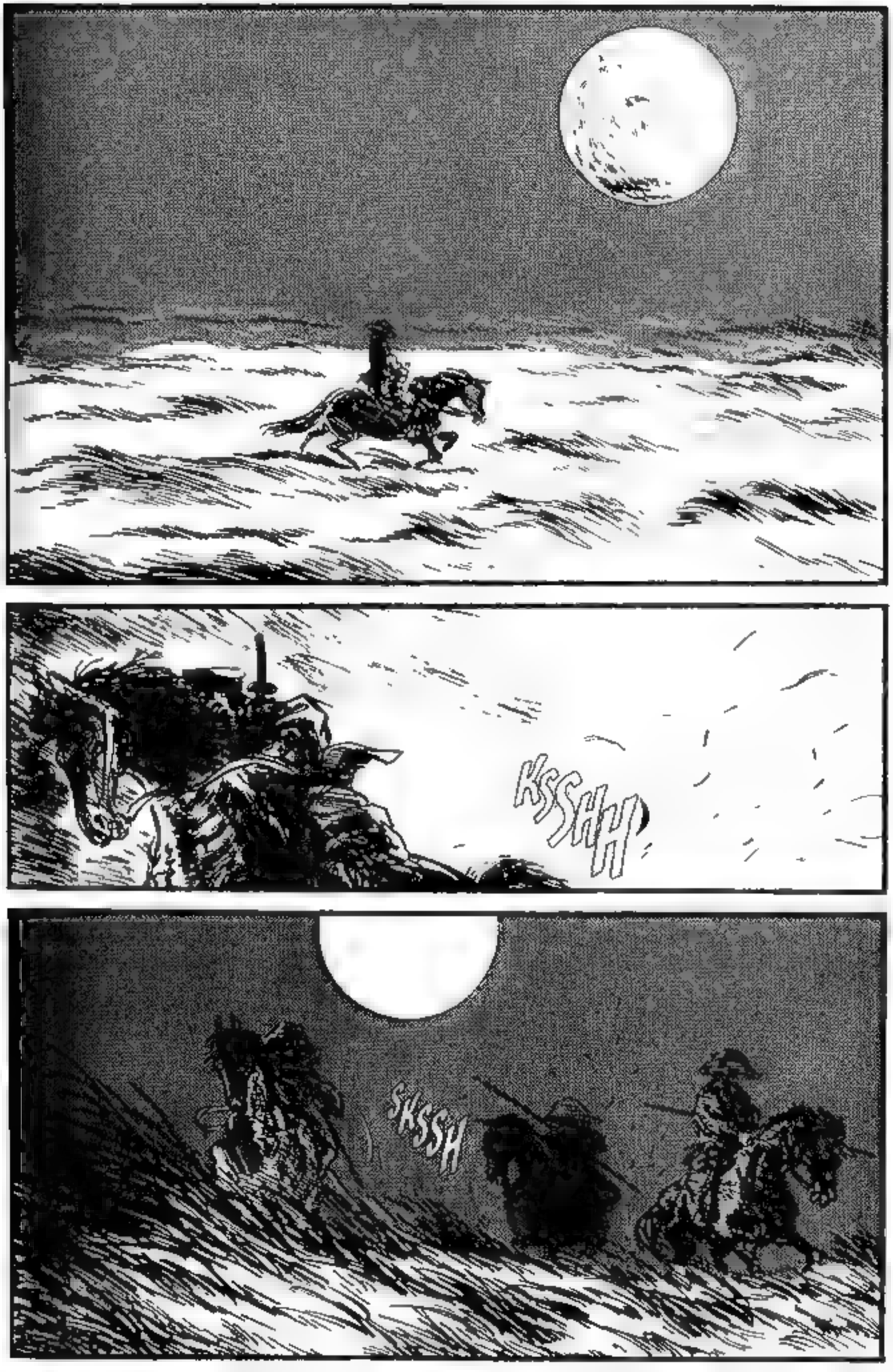
FWKK

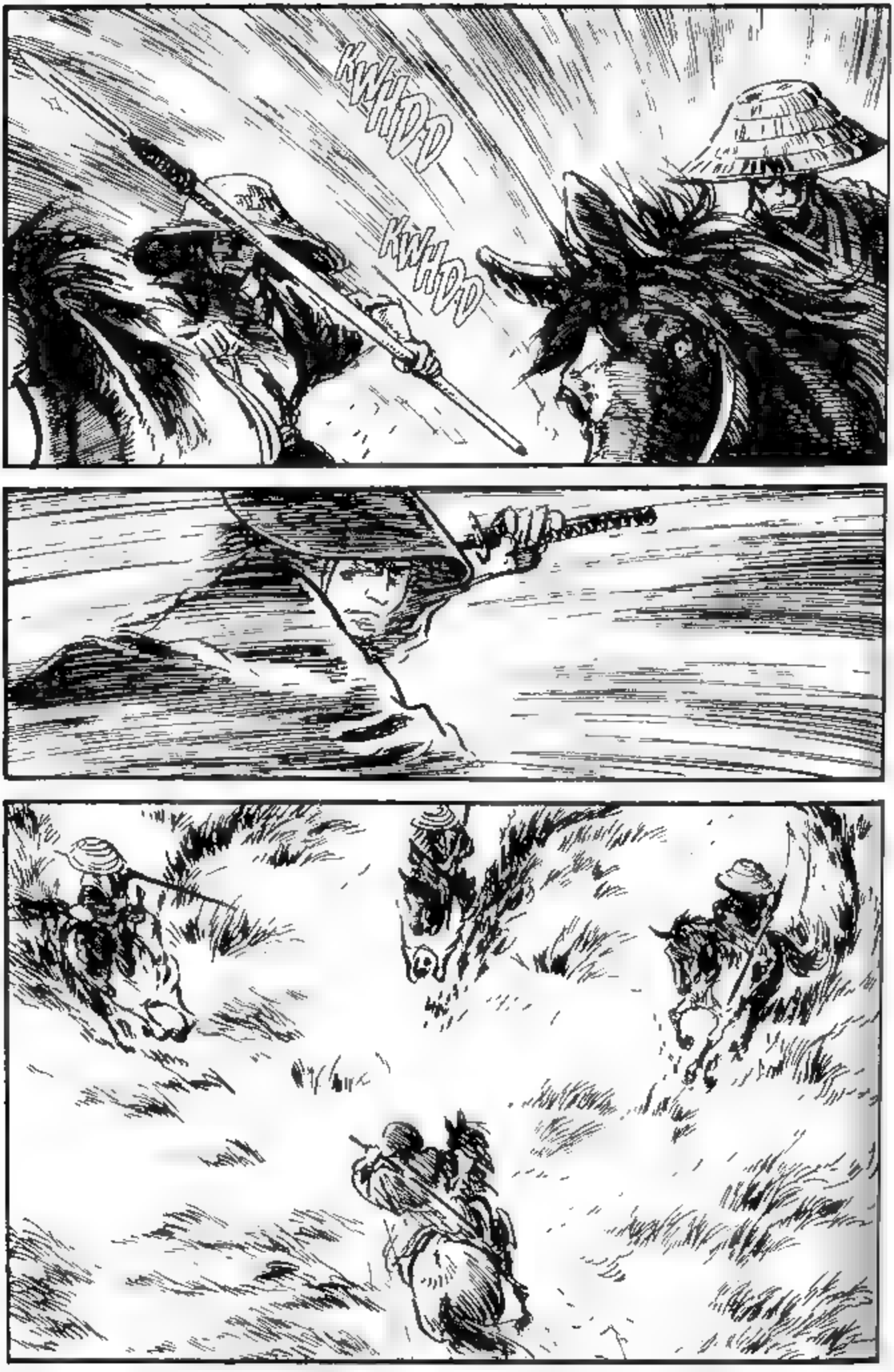
SPLIT

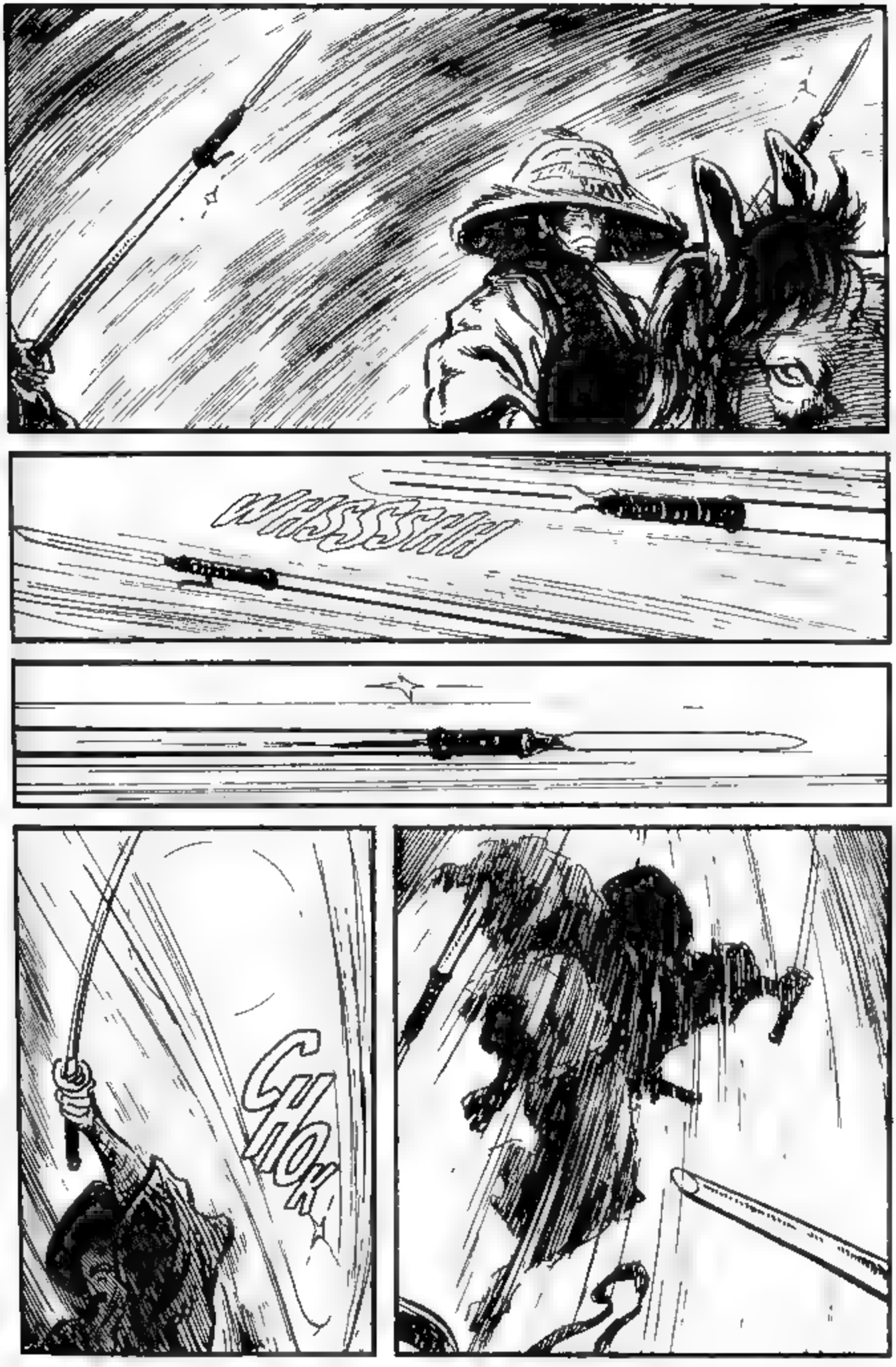

SKWWK

KCHK

IF THE URA-YAGYŪ ATTACK
...THEN THE RUMORS ARE TRUE!


KSSHH!
SKSSH


KWIDD
KWIDD


WHOOSH
GLOK

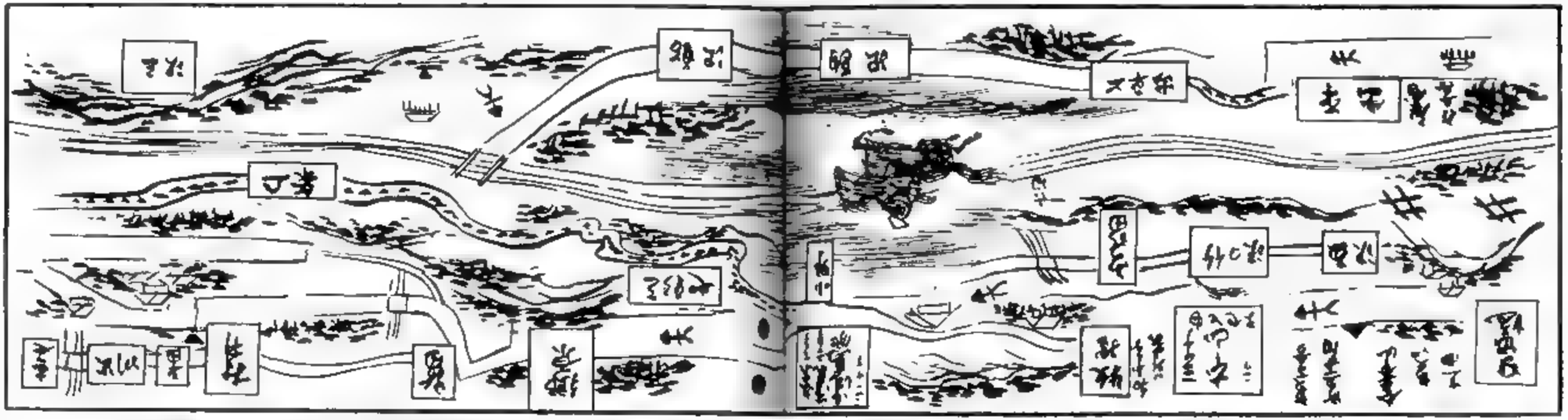
SKLICH

SCHOK
KCHK

TAKE HIM!!

HALT!!

ASAEMON THE DECAPITATOR IS A *MASTER* OF *SUEMONO-GIRI!!* I'VE *UNDERESTIMATED* THAT SWORD—HE'S THE EQUAL OF ŌGAMI ITTŌ HIMSELF!
WOULD IT NOT BE *AMUSING* TO PIT THE ONE AGAINST THE OTHER ?!
IF ITTŌ WINS, WELL AND GOOD AND IF *ASAEMON* SURVIVES, THEN THE URA-YAGYŪ NAY, I *MYSELF* SHALL KILL THE DECAPITATOR!
WOLF AND *EAGLE* BATTLE, AND THE *HUNTER* TAKES THE WEAKENED *VICTOR!* IS THIS NOT PERFECT?!
MIZUNO! KANŌ! WAKADOSHIYORI *UPSTARTS!* YOU CANNOT TOUCH ME!



KHOK KHOK

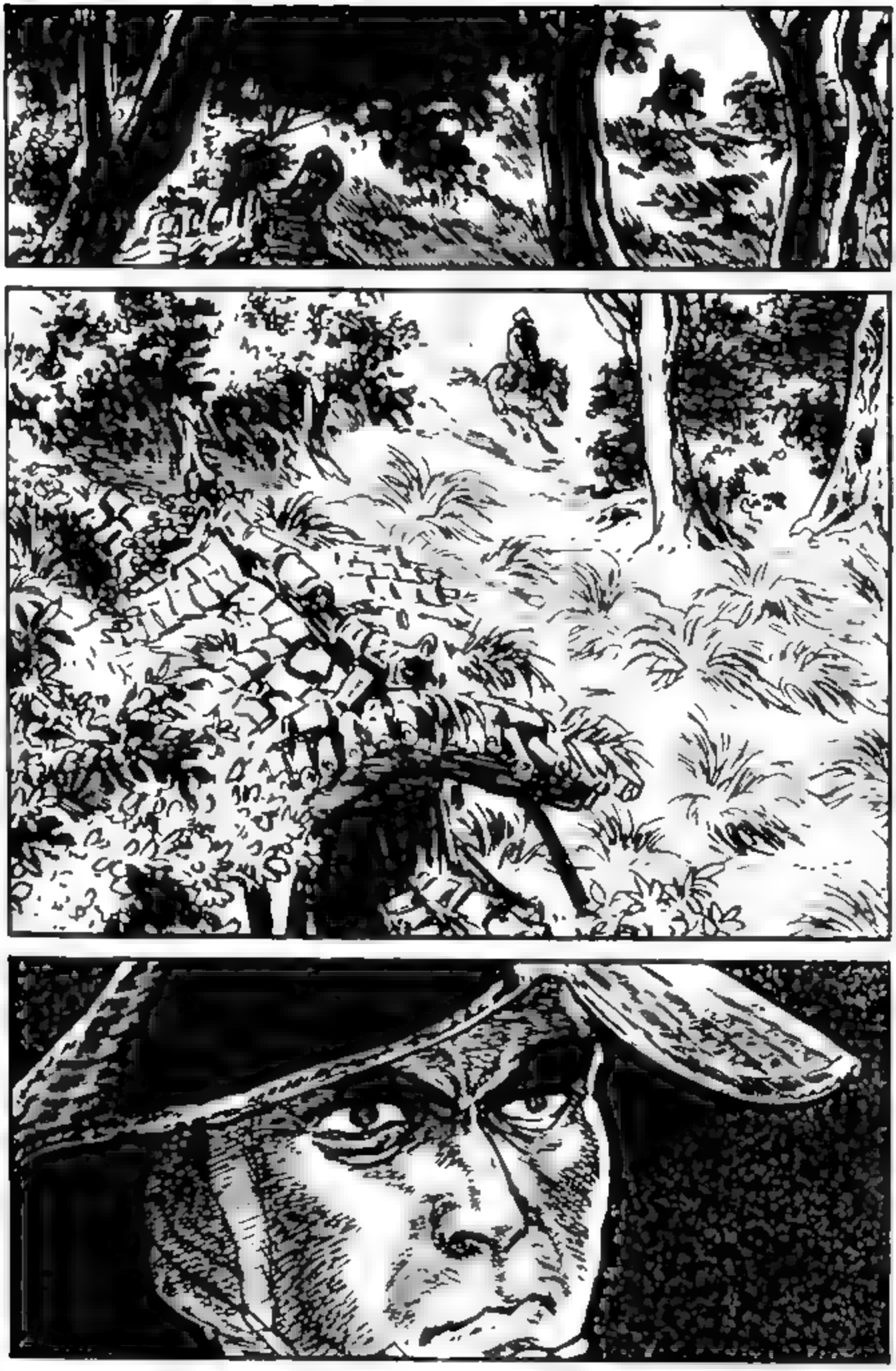
KHOH
KHOH

KCHING

"WATCH THE TEMPLE GATES FOR THE VOTIVE TALISMANS OF MEIFUMADŌ, THE HORSE- AND OX-HEADED DEMONS OF HELL!

"THUS IT IS SAID ITTŌ FINDS HIS CLIENTS!"

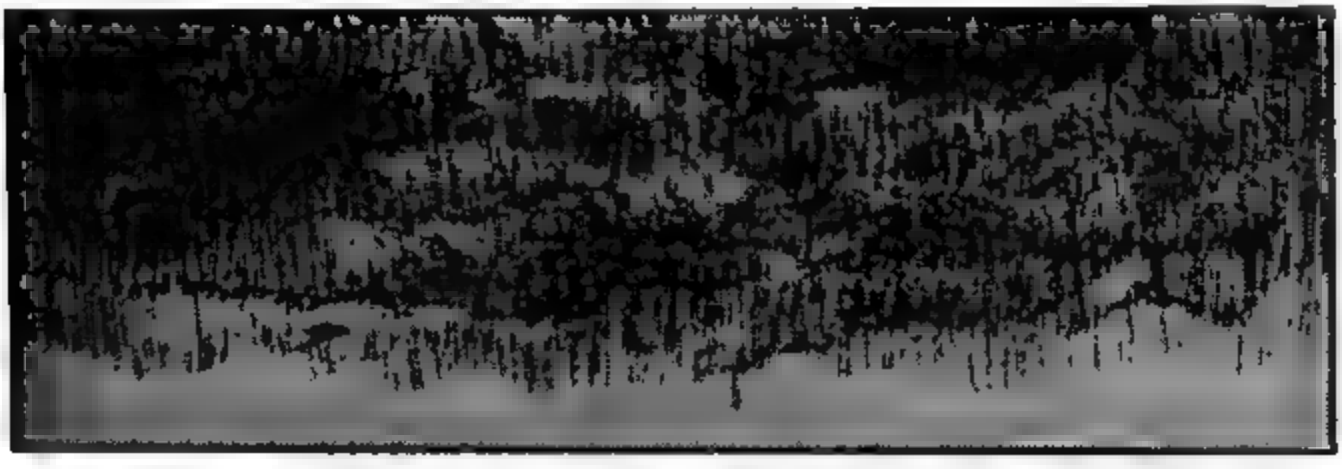
KTOK
KTOKK

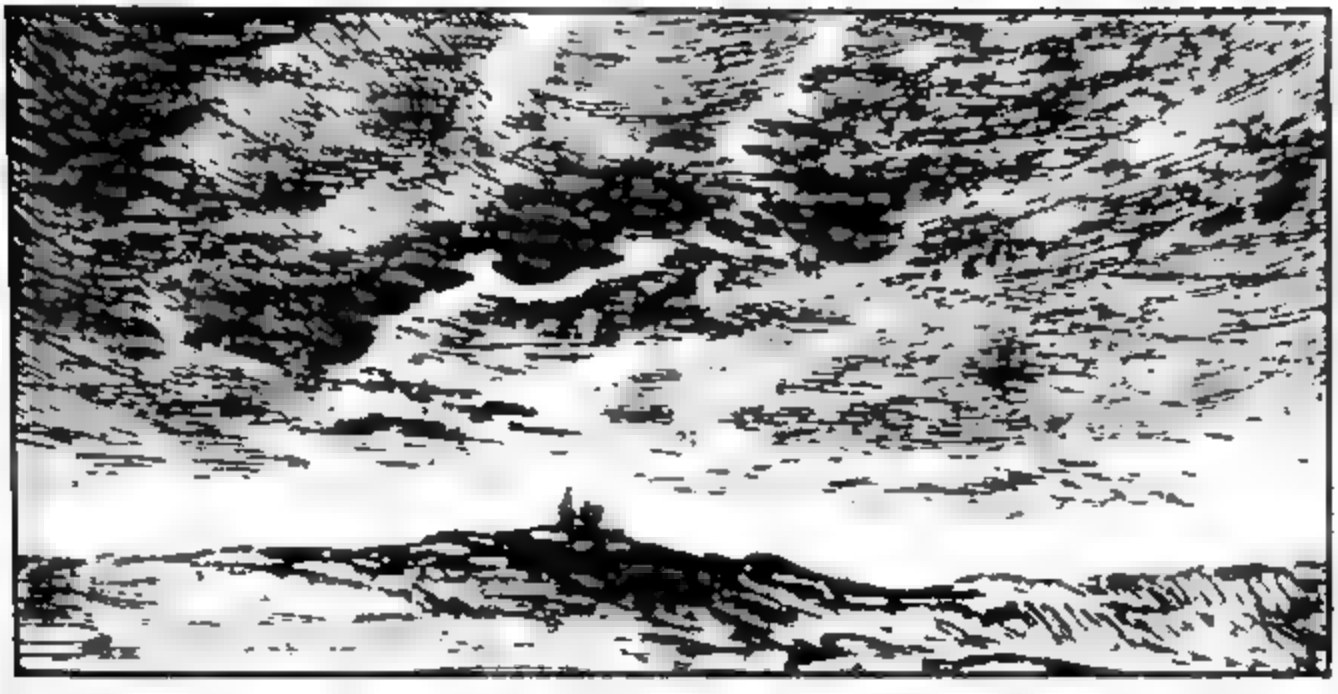


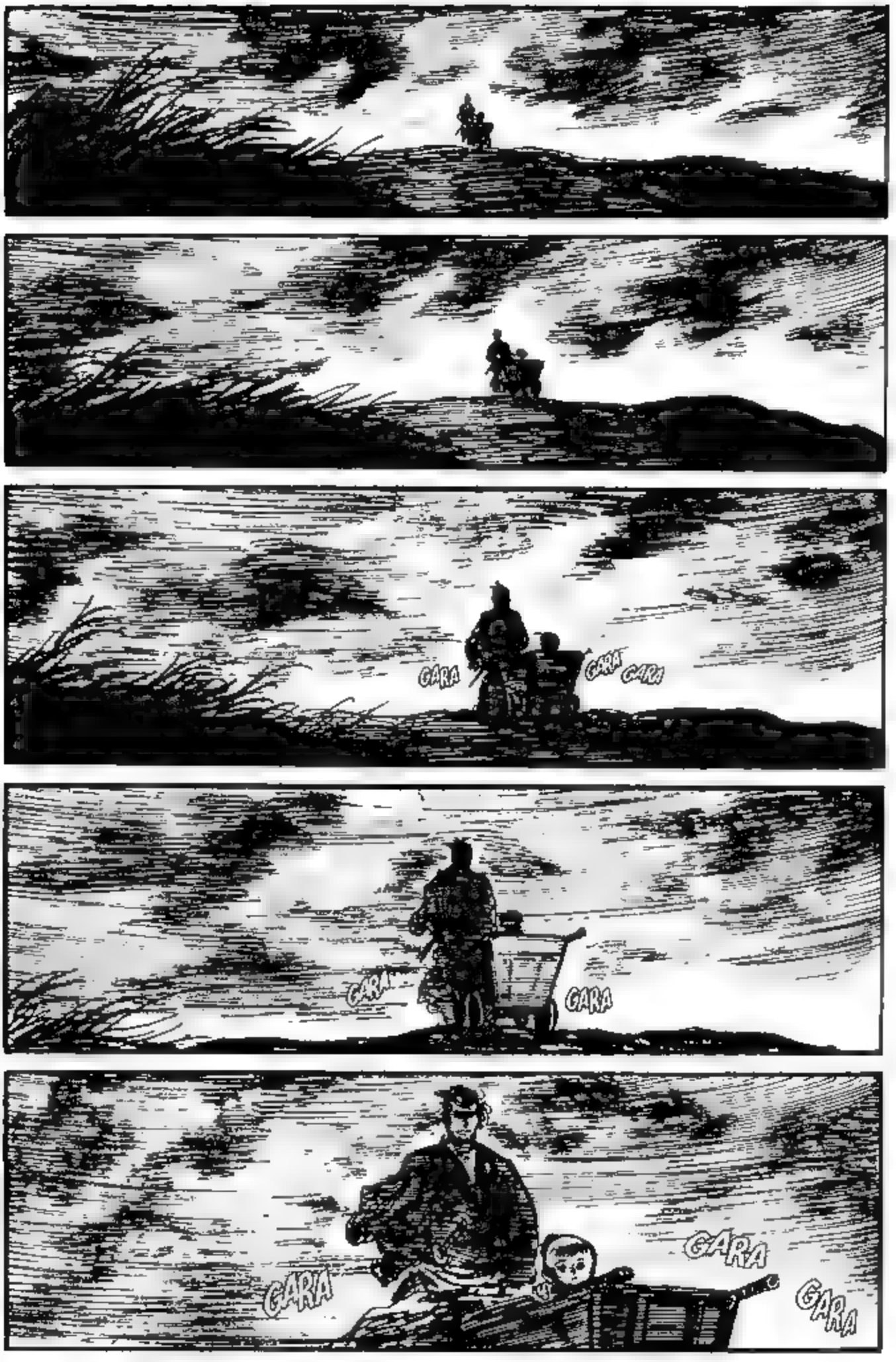
THE TALISMAN OF *MEIFUMADŌ!*
*NORTH FIELD. BUDDHAS. DEATH.

KSSSHH

WSSSSSHH






GARA
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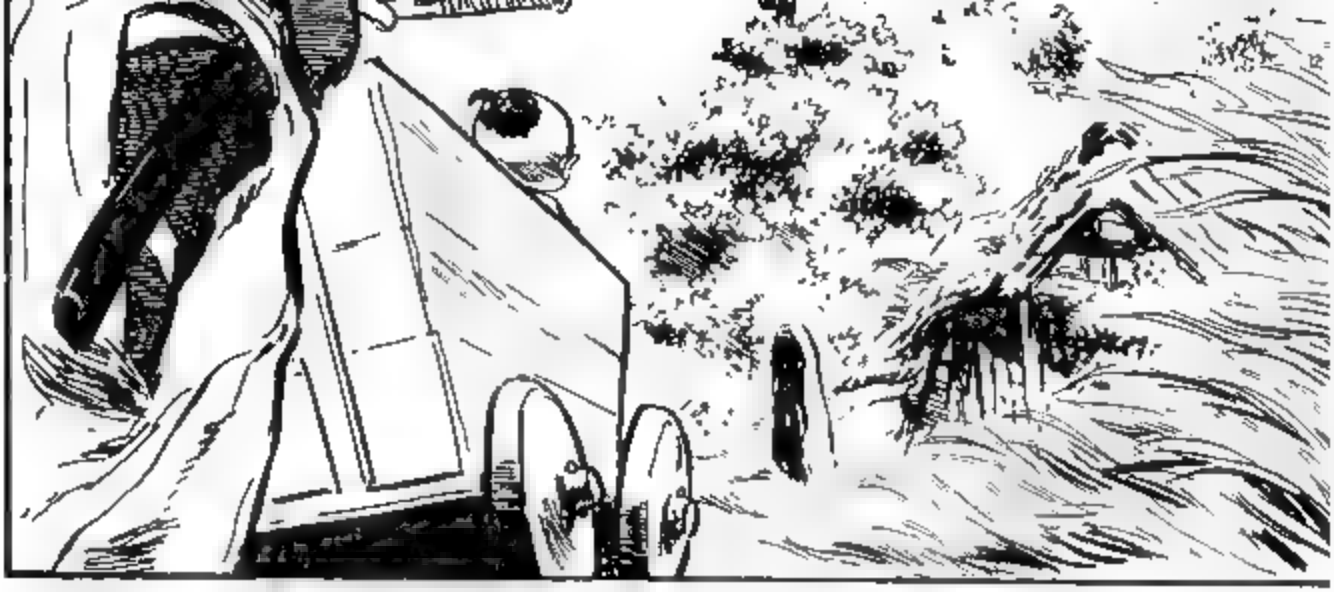
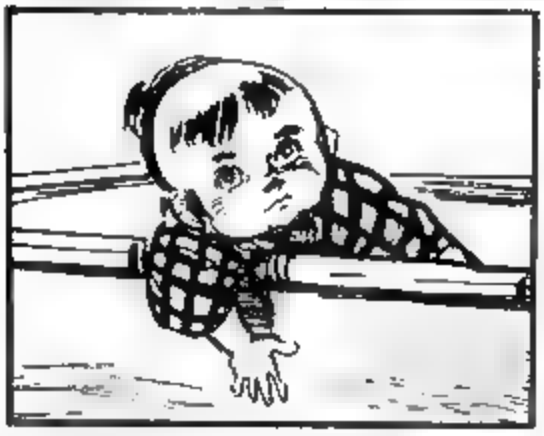
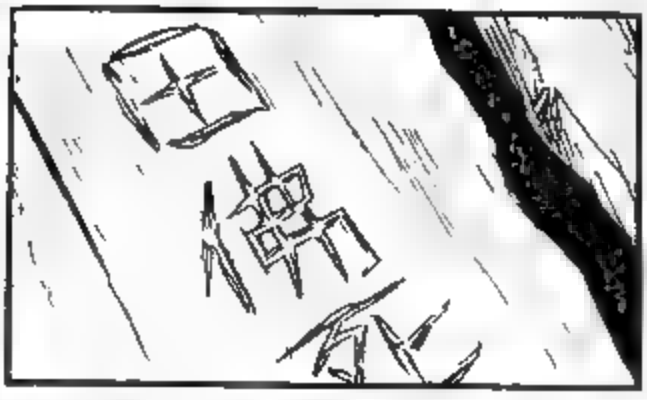
GARA

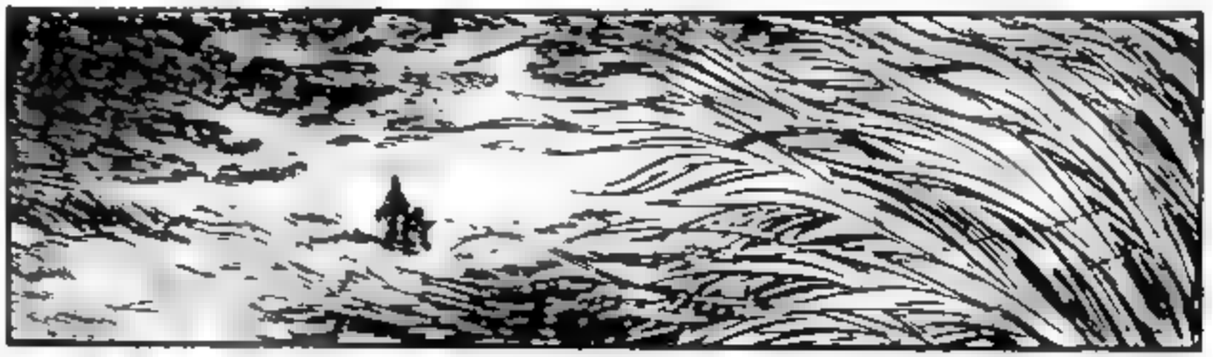






DUE NORTH. BUDDHAS. KUYŌ-GA-HARA, THE FIELD OF PRAYERS!

ASHCAN



YAMADA ASAEMON! *O-TAMESHI!* FOR THE SHŌGUN!

ŌGAMI ITTŌ!

FOLLOWING THE COMMAND OF THE *WAKADOSHIYORI* LORDS, KANŌ TŌTŌMI-NO-KAMI AND MIZUNO BUNGO-NO-KAMI, I COME ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS OF THE SHŌGUNATE!

. . . .
. . . .

ARE THE RUMORS OF THE WORLD *TRUE?* DO YOU FOLLOW THE PATH OF THE *ASSASSIN*, SLAUGHTERING COUNTLESS MEN?! ANSWER!

IF YOU HAVE SEEN THE TALISMANS OF *MEIFUMADŌ*, AND LAID *DŌCHŪJIN* TRAIL MARKERS TO GUIDE AN ASSASSIN TO THIS PLACE, HAVE YOU NEED TO ASK?

THEN.

WHY DO YOU WALK THE ASSASSIN'S ROAD?!

TO *AVENGE* THE ŌGAMI CLAN!

THE URA-YAGYŪ ARE THE *SHŌGUN'S* ASSASSINS—I CANNOT HAVE MY VENGEANCE UNLESS I WALK THAT SAME ASSASSIN'S ROAD!

VERY WELL!

BY THE WILL OF THE *GŌ-RŌJŪ* SENIOR COUNCILORS, I MUST TAKE YOUR HONORABLE LIFE.

PREPARE FOR DEATH!

AS ONE DECAPITATOR TO ANOTHER, I PROPOSE A *SUEMONO-TAMESHI* DUEL. DO YOU ACCEPT?

I DO!

READY!

THREE BUDDHAS BY *O-TAMESHI*, AND THEN WE DUEL!

UNDER-STOOD!

WHSSHH

YAMADA SCHOOL *SUEMONO-GIRI!!* MY SWORD, *ONIBŌCHŌ!*

SUIO SCHOOL *ZANBATŌ!* MY SWORD, *DŌTANUKI!*

KSSSHHH

READY?!

MM!

FDD
SHHK
SKSSH
SKSSH

SHNNNG

KRANNG

KTANNNG

WSHANNNG

FDD

SKSSHHH

SKSSHHH

TWIST

ONIBŌCHŌ..
BROKEN...!
FWOO
KANG
?!
AN IRON COLLAR?!
HRRN!! THE URA-YAGYŪ!

THEY MUST HAVE *ANTICIPATED* IT WOULD BE AN *O-TAMESHI* DUEL, AND PUT COLLARS ON THE STATUES.
TO KILL *ME* ? OR ELSE
HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THIS COLLAR, IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN ME WHO FELL HERE TODAY. WAS IT THE YAGYU'S SCHEMES THAT SAVED ME, OR THE DEMONS OF *MEIFUMADŌ* ?
THIS MUCK IS CLEAR! THE YAGYŪ ARE SO DESPERATE THEY'LL STOOP TO *ANYTHING* TO DEFEAT ME!
NISEN BYAKUDO —THE WHITE WAY BETWEEN THE TWO RIVERS! IS OUR VENGEANCE AT HAND?!
YAMADA ASAEMON YOSHITSUGU DIED THE SEVENTH YEAR OF *MEIWA*, 1770 OFFICIAL "CAUSE OF DEATH" SUDDEN ILLNESS.

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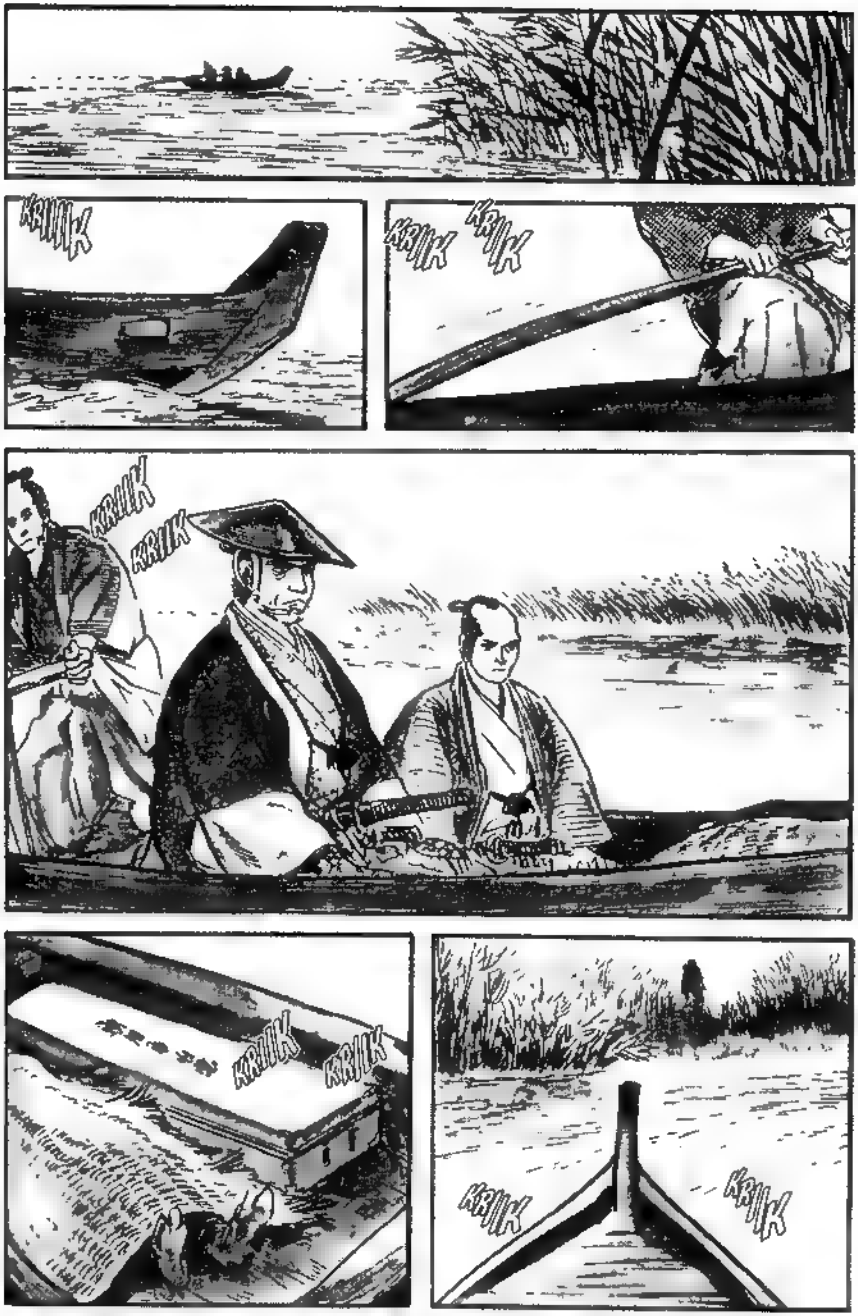
Scanner: Mavi

the twenty-eighth

The Guns of Sakai


KRRIK
KRRIK
KRRIK
KRRIK
KRRIK
KRRIK
KRRIK
KRRIK

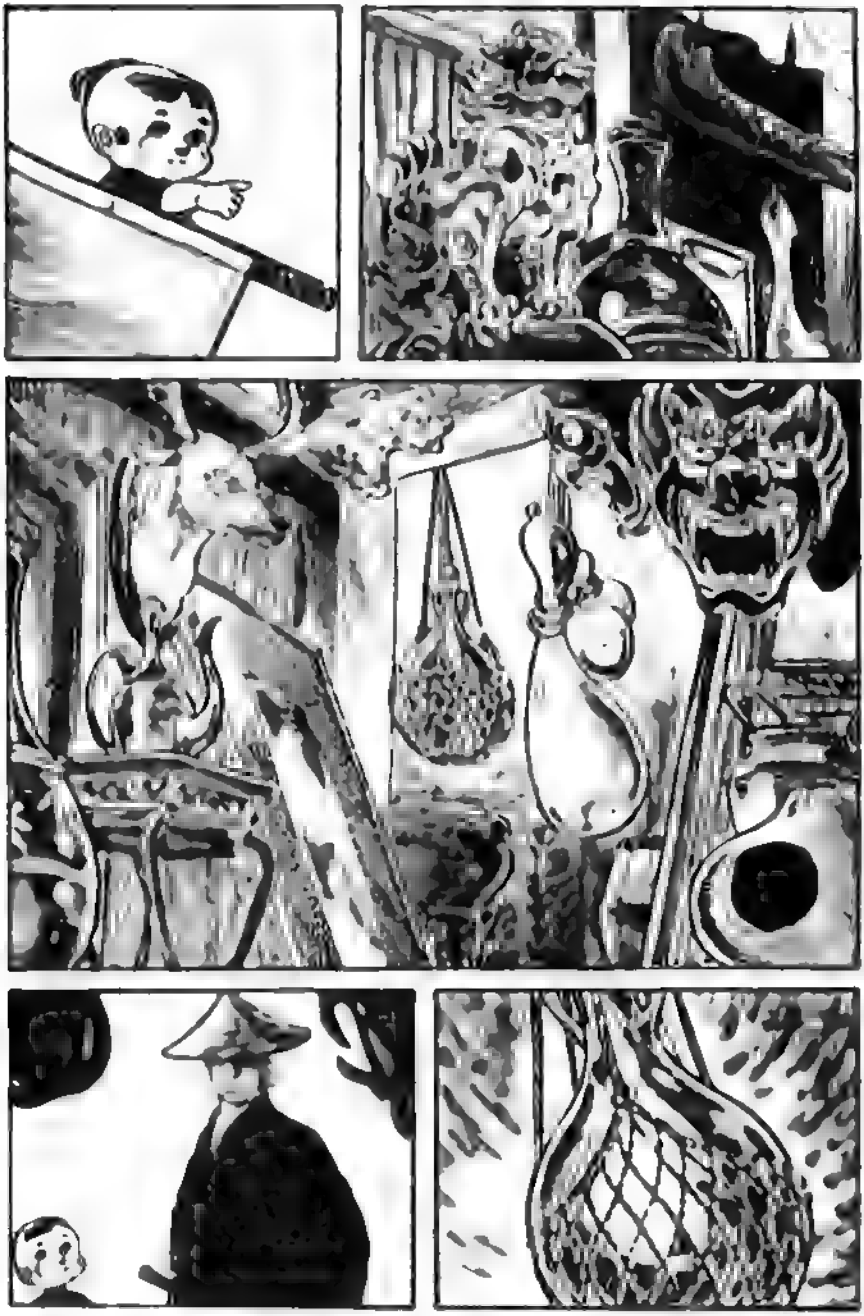
SWISSH
BIOUE GEKI COMMANDER OF THE ŌSAKA CASTLE GUARDS RIFLE DETACHMENT
ŌGAMI ITTŌ
THERE'S A GUAI SAMIN IN SENSHŪ SAKAI NAMED SHICHIRŌBEI HE MUST BE
HERE'S YOUR FIVE HUNDRED RYŌ

I KNEW
SERVICES OF LONE WOLF AND CUB, THE
I'LL HEAD T GRIBB
THE FIVE GUNSMITHS OF
THIS IS A BAKUFU
BUT RECENTLY
BEEN MAKING GUNS IN SECRET FOR OTHER CLIENTS. HE'S SELLING THEM TO THE WESTERN HAN!

WE HAVE AN INFORMANT.
AHEM.
WE SENT UNDER-COVER INVESTIGATORS ATTACHED TO THE ŌSAKA CASTLE JŌDAI TO INVESTIGATE, BUT...
THIS IS THE LAST MAN WE SENT IN—THE THIRD

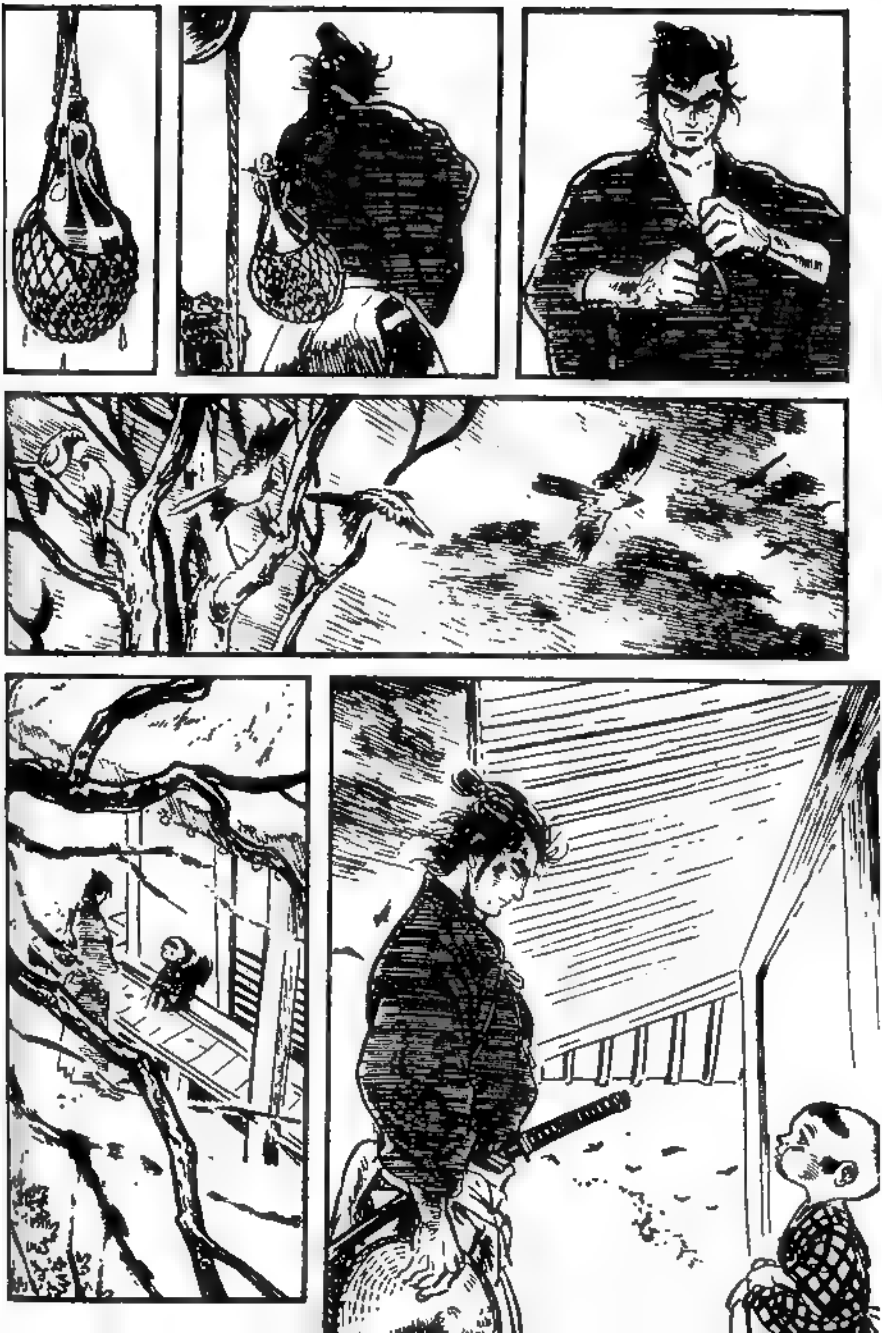
HIS BODY WASHED UP ON THE BANK OF THE OYODO RIVER LAST NIGHT. LOOK CLOSELY!! HE WAS HIT SIMULTANEOUSLY BY A SCORE OR MORE THREE-*MONME* LEAD BULLETS!
SO IT SEEMS SHICHIRŌBEI ISN'T MAKING NORMAL *SAKAIZUTSU*. HE'S BEEN WORKING IN SECRET TO PERFECT SOME KIND OF DEADLY *MULTIPLE-FIRE WEAPON*
IF THESE NEW GUNS REACH THE ARMORIES OF THE WESTERN *HAN* IN LARGE NUMBERS, IT COULD THREATEN THE SHŌGUNATE ITSELF!
WE NEED THE PERMISSION OF THE *TEPPŌ BUGYŌ* COMMISSIONER OF FIREARMS IN EDO TO PROSECUTE A SHŌGUNATE GUNSMITH.
BUT THAT TAKES *TIME*, AND THERE ISN'T A MOMENT TO LOSE! SHICHIRŌBEI MUST BE ELIMINATED *IMMEDIATELY*
OF COURSE, WE'LL SEARCH HIS WORKSHOP AFTERWARDS, AND MAKE WHATEVER WE DISCOVER PUBLIC.
I *IMPLORE* YOU TO TAKE THE JOB!
I SEE YOU'VE THOUGHT IT THROUGH!

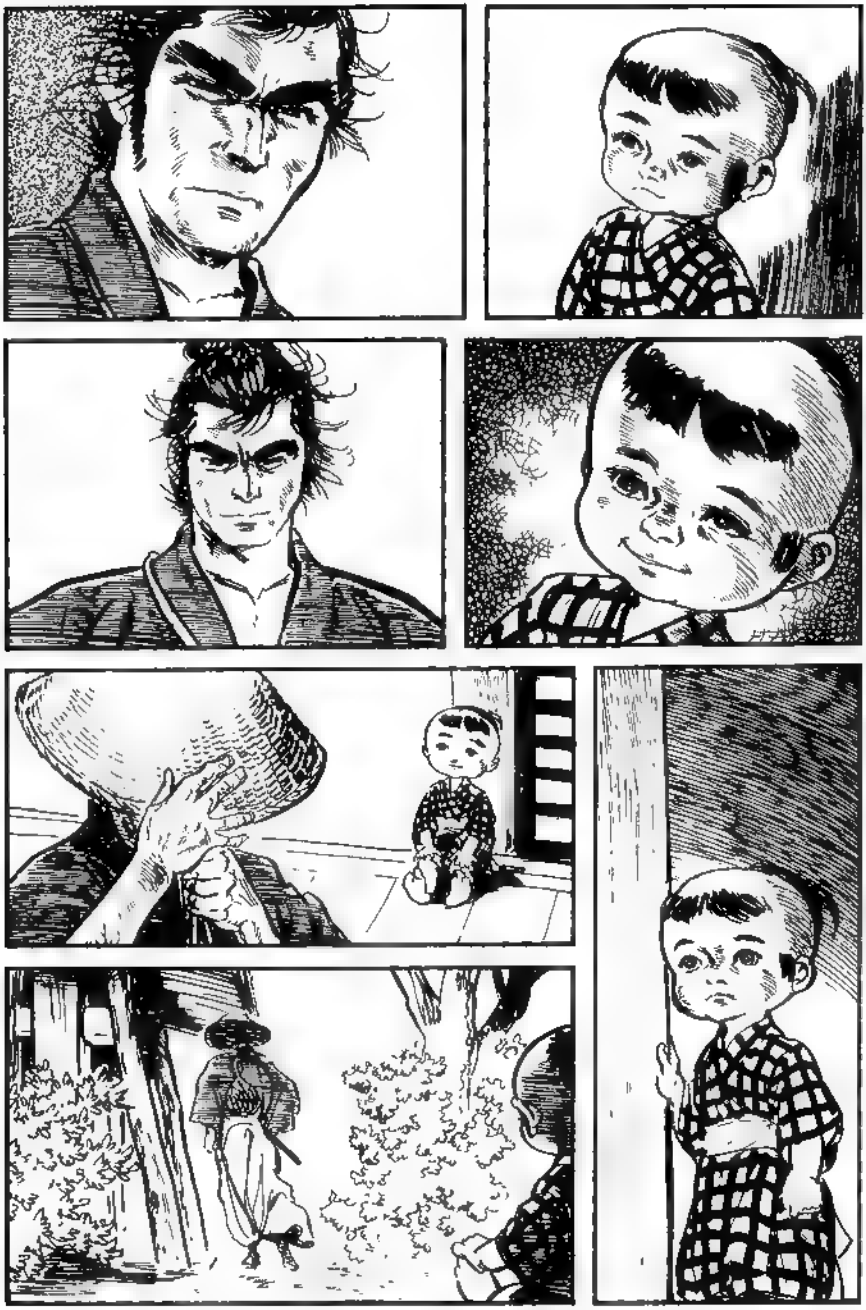
WH- WHAT DO YOU MEAN ?
YOU SEND ME INTO A HAIL OF BULLETS, PITTING ME AGAINST SHICHIRŌBEI.
THAT WAY YOU CAN SEE WHAT HE'S BEEN MAKING, SEIZE IT, AND TAKE CREDIT FOR IT YOURSELF!
B- BUT I DIDN'T
WITH ENOUGH MEAL YOU COULD SEARCH HIS WORKSHOP AND BRING THIS TO LIGHT WITHOUT ME.
BUT .BUT HE'S CERTAIN TO USE HIS DEADLY NEW WEAPON! OUR CASUALTIES WOULD BE IMMENSE!
THAT'S WHY I WANT YOU! DO YOU REFUSE?!
NO. I'LL DO IT.
Y-YOU CAN TAKE AS MANY SAKAITEUTSU AS YOU NEED!
I NEED NOTHING!

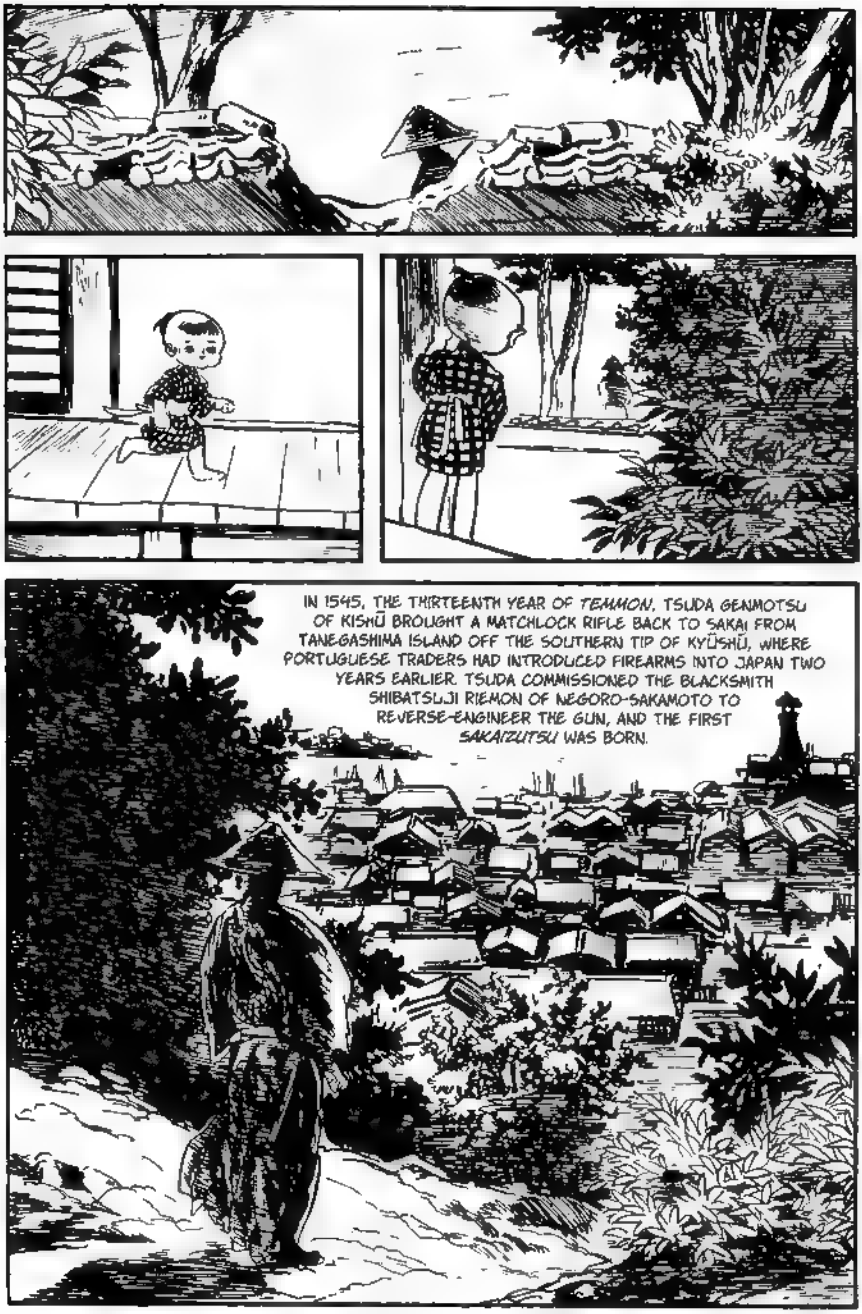


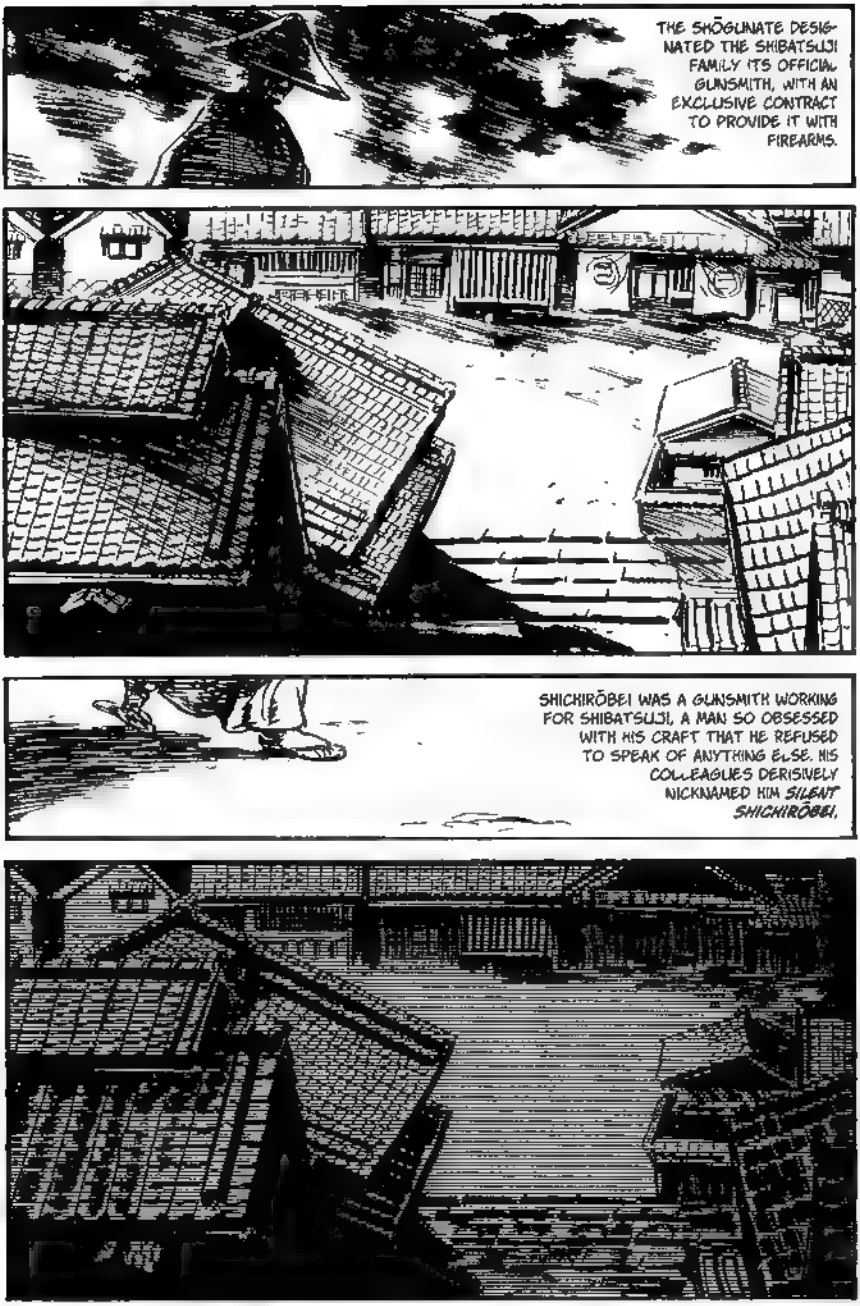
MY SWELL-
ER IS THERE SOMETHING YOU'D LIKE TO LIL SELL ?
I WANT THAT GIYAMAN
PARDON ? TH-THIS ? FOR YOU ?
YES
NOW THIS THIS IS A MAS-TER PIECE
NOT LIKE THOSE CHEAP IMITATIONS YOU'LL FIND IN OTHER STORES.
NO SIR, THIS IS THE FIN-EST GIYAMAN IN ALL SAKAI. ONE OF A KIND!

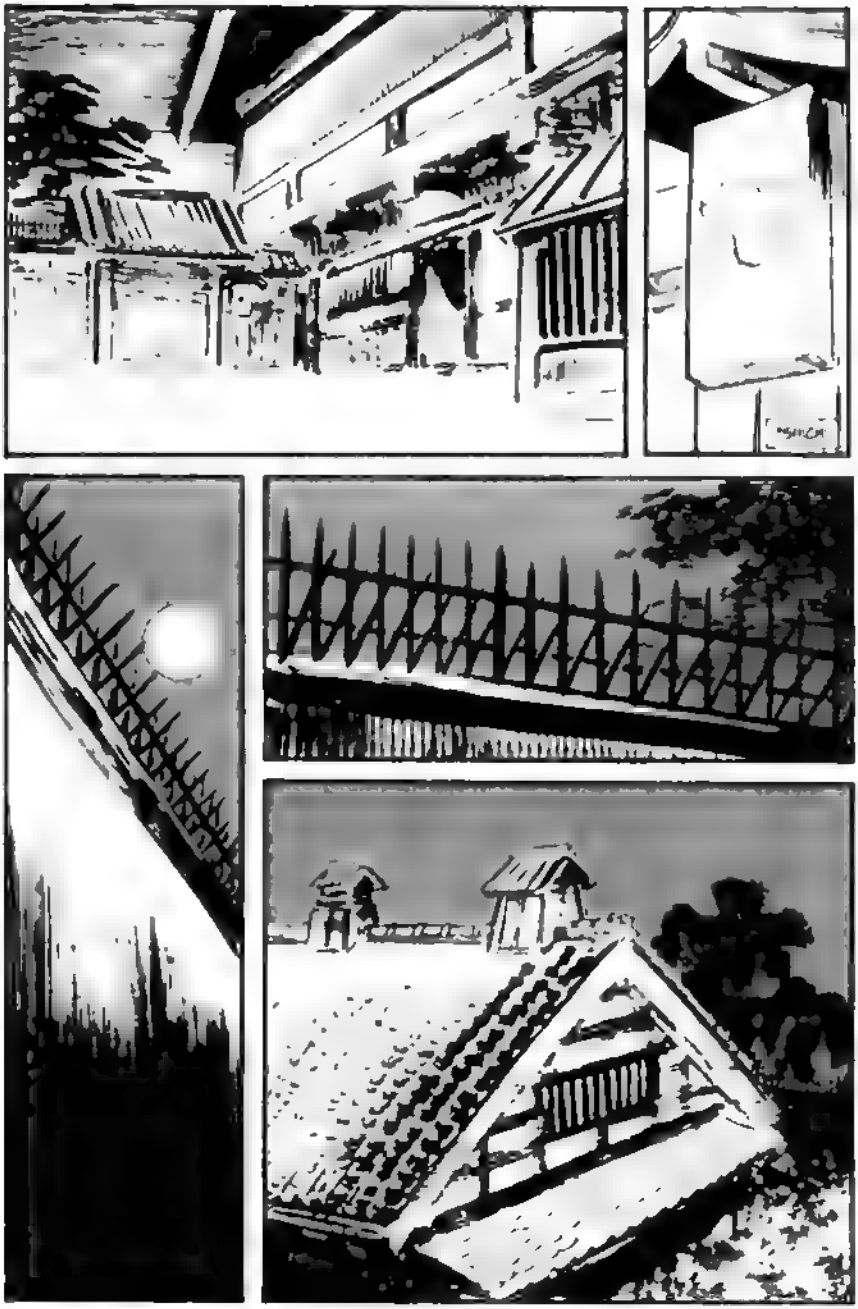
HOLD IT CARE-FULLY

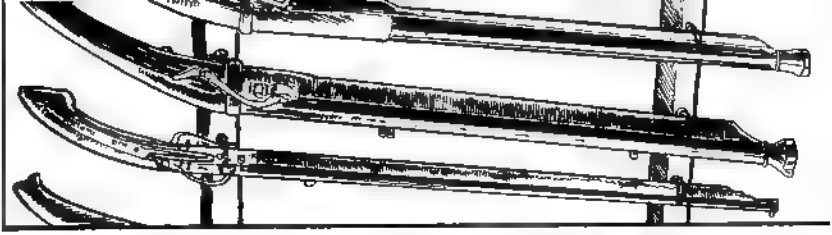


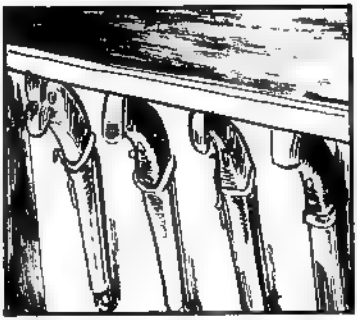


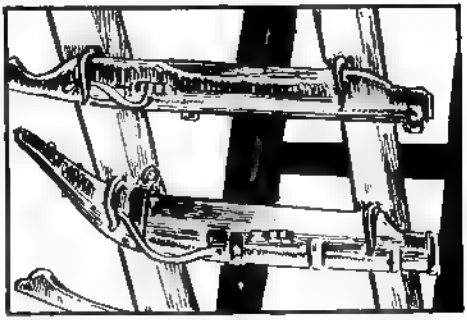

IN 1545, THE THIRTEENTH YEAR OF *TENMON*, TSUDA GENMOTSU OF KISHŪ BROUGHT A MATCHLOCK RIFLE BACK TO SAKAI FROM TANEGASHIMA ISLAND OFF THE SOUTHERN TIP OF KYŪSHŪ, WHERE PORTUGUESE TRADERS HAD INTRODUCED FIREARMS INTO JAPAN TWO YEARS EARLIER. TSUDA COMMISSIONED THE BLACKSMITH SHIBATSUJI RIEMON OF NEGORO-SAKAMOTO TO REVERSE-ENGINEER THE GUN, AND THE FIRST *SAKAIZUTSU* WAS BORN.

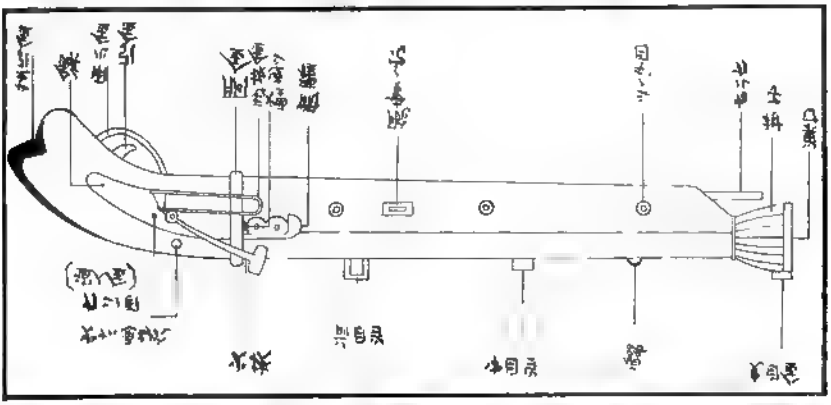

THE SHŌGUNATE DESIGNATED THE SHIBATSUJI FAMILY ITS OFFICIAL GUNSMITH, WITH AN EXCLUSIVE CONTRACT TO PROVIDE IT WITH FIREARMS.
SHICHIRŌBEI WAS A GUNSMITH WORKING FOR SHIBATSUJI, A MAN SO OBSESSED WITH HIS CRAFT THAT HE REFUSED TO SPEAK OF ANYTHING ELSE. HIS COLLEAGUES DERISIVELY NICKNAMED HIM SILENT SHICHIRŌBEI.

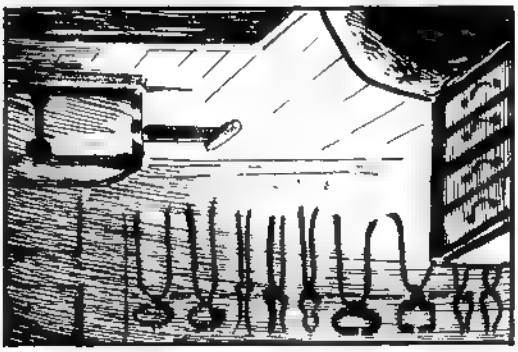




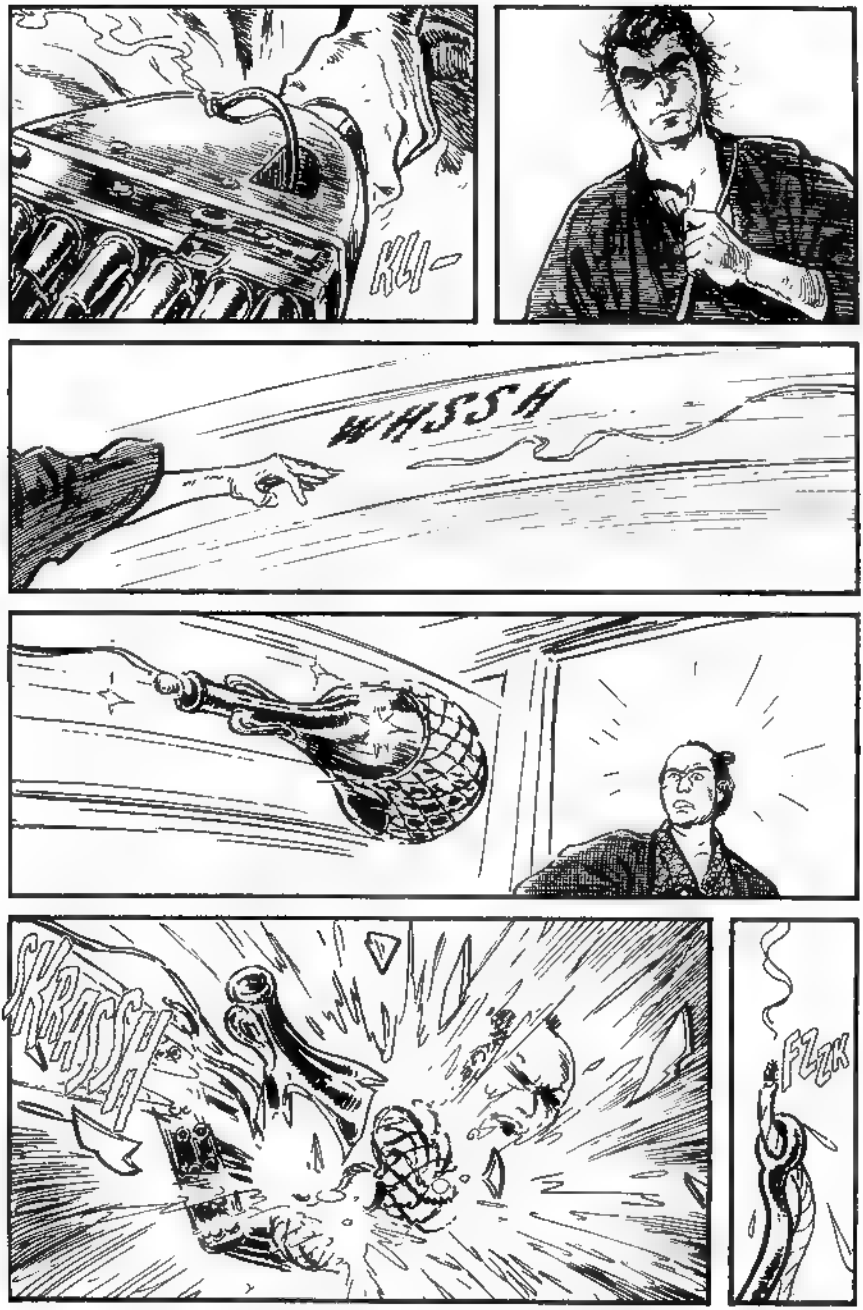






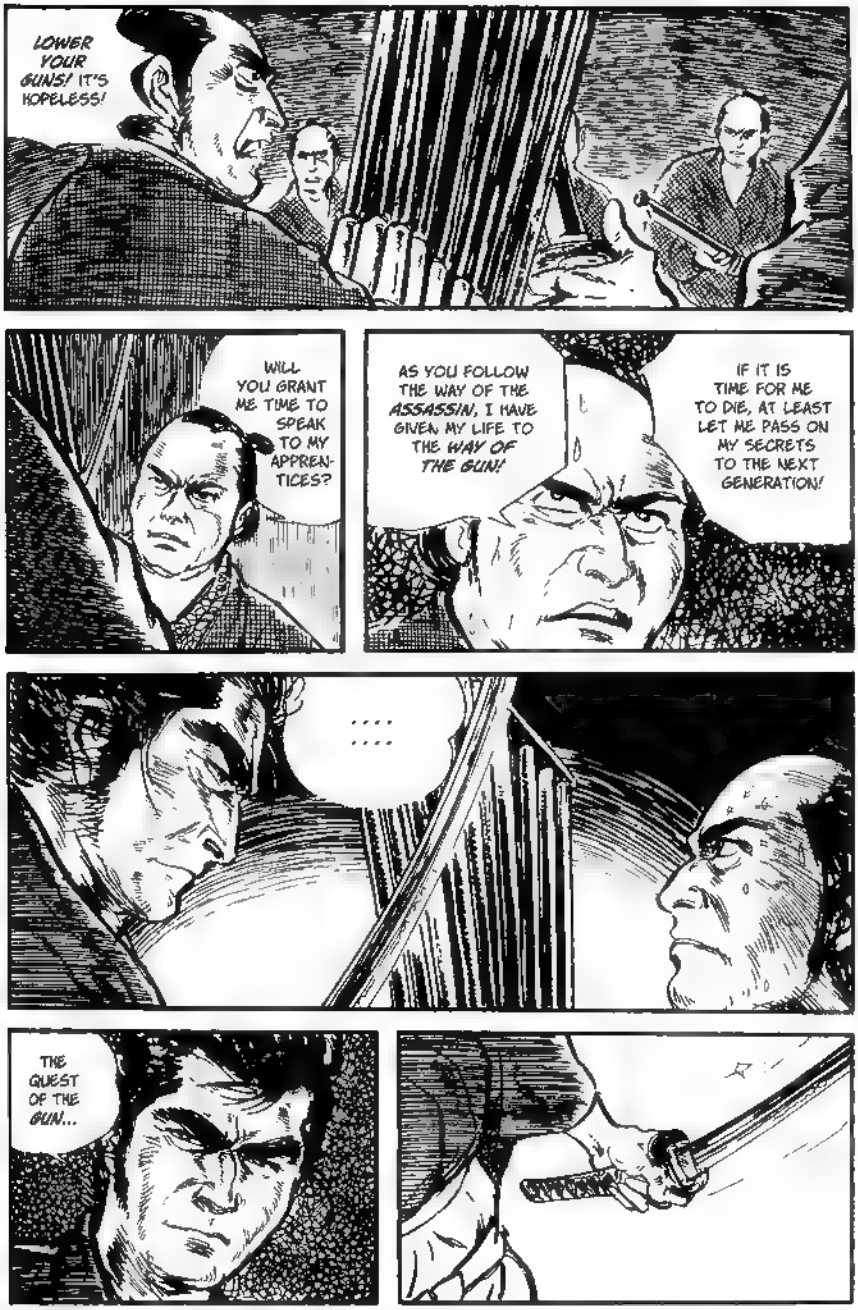


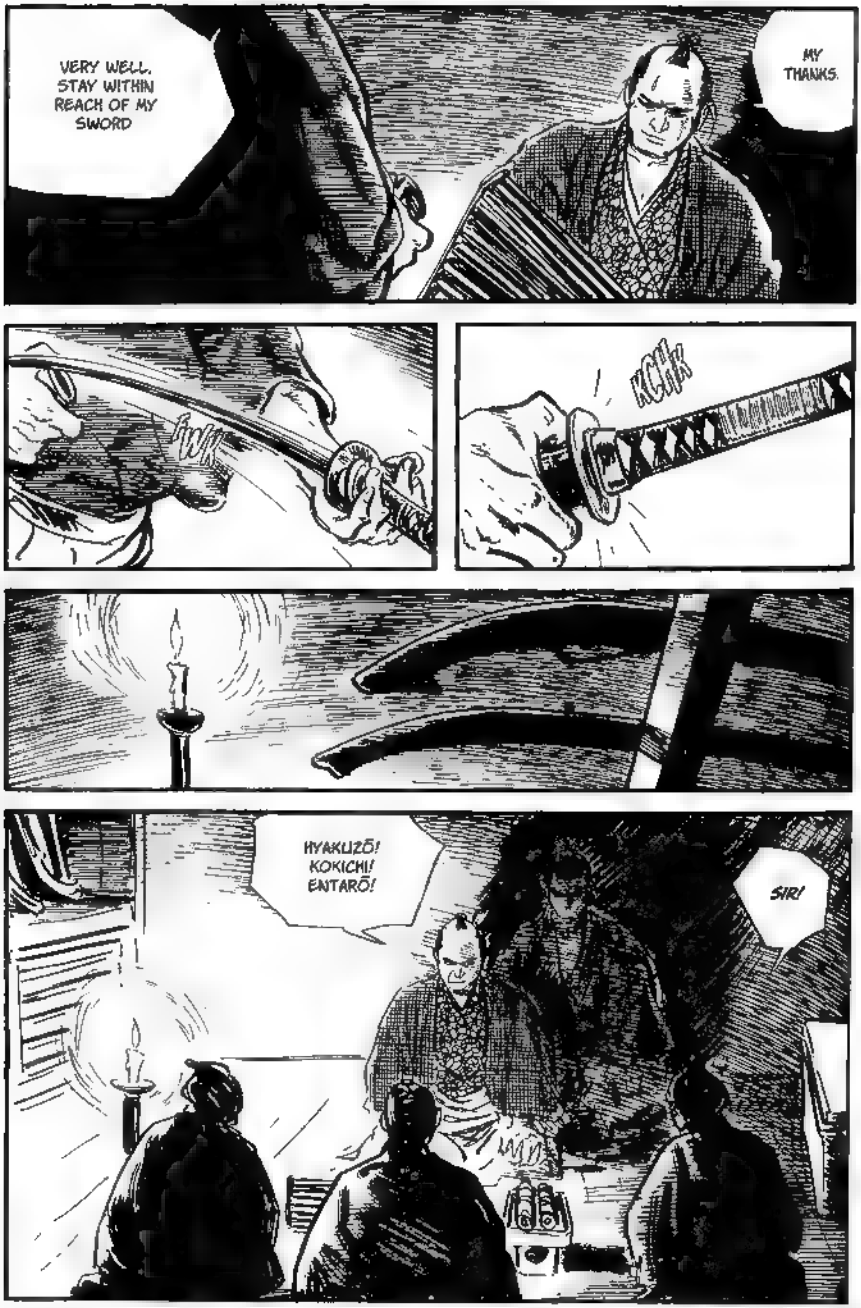
KSHAKK
RAH!
WHO ARE YOU?!
ASSASSIN! LONE WOLF AND CUB.
ASSAS-SIN?!


KU—
WHSSH
KRASH
FZZK

A WATER-FILLED GIYAMAN TO EXTINGUISH MY FUSE! BRILLIANT! YET THE MINUTE YOU KILL ME, YOU DIE!
WHAT WILL YOU DO?!
....
....

LIFE, DEATH. BOTH ARE MEANINGLESS TO AN ASSASSIN OF MUSŌ. THERE IS ONLY DEATH TO HIS TARGET!
NO!


LOWER YOUR GUNS! IT'S HOPELESS!
WILL YOU GRANT ME TIME TO SPEAK TO MY APPRENTICES?
AS YOU FOLLOW THE WAY OF THE ASSASSIN, I HAVE GIVEN MY LIFE TO THE WAY OF THE GUN!
IF IT IS TIME FOR ME TO DIE, AT LEAST LET ME PASS ON MY SECRETS TO THE NEXT GENERATION!
....
....
THE QUEST OF THE GUN...

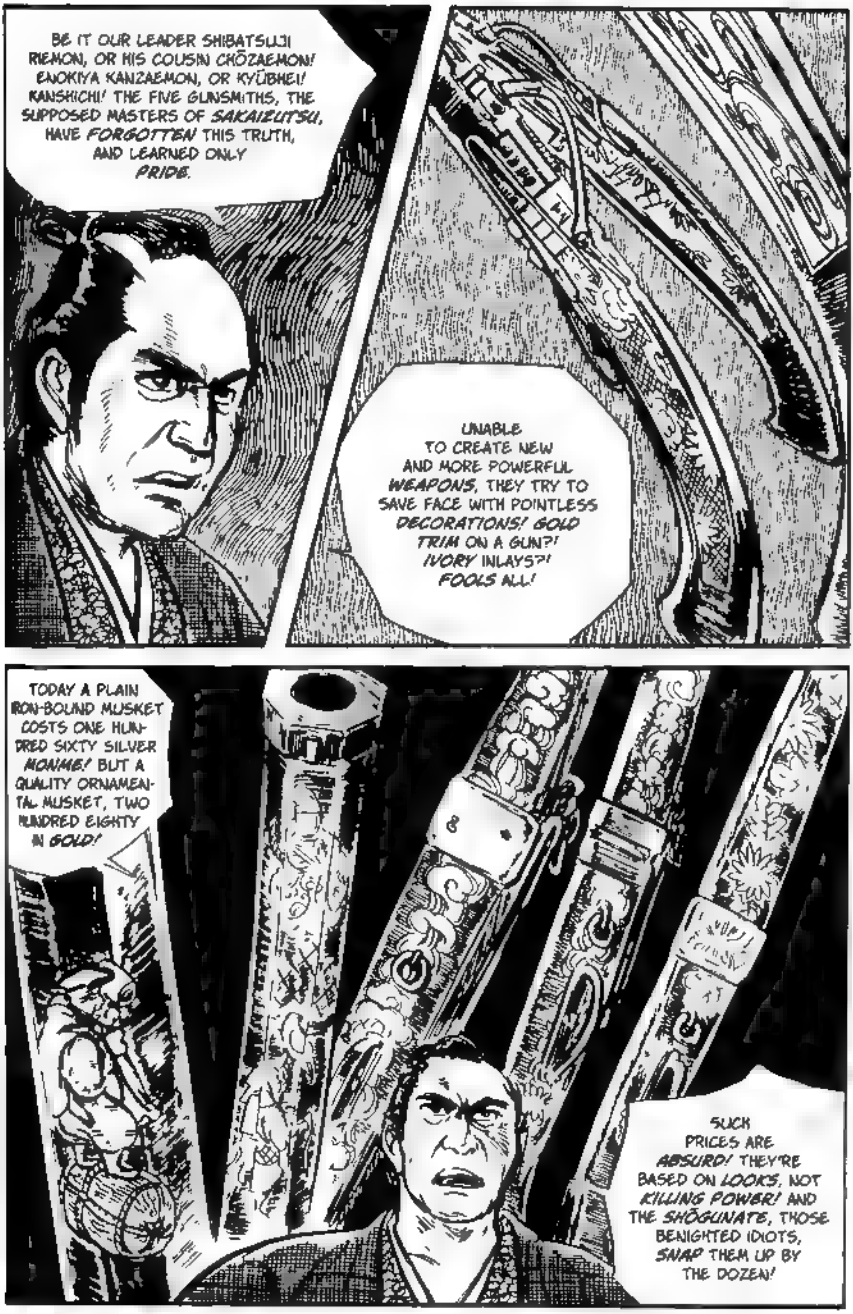

VERY WELL. STAY WITHIN REACH OF MY SWORD
MY THANKS.
IWK
KOK
HYAKUZŌ! KOKICHI! ENTARŌ!
SIR!

A QUESTION FOR YOU ALL. WHAT IS THE VERY SOUL OF A GUN?
.....!
HYAKUZŌ! YOU GO FIRST!
Y-YES, SIR!
I UNDERSTAND IT TO BE FIRST, ACCURACY, AND SECONDLY, RELIABILITY
HMM. KOKICHI! WHAT ABOUT YOU?
I AGREE WITH THE SENIOR APPRENTICE, SIR..
BUT I WOULD ADD THAT IT MUST BE IMBUED WITH THE GUNSMITH'S HEART

ENTARŌ!
SIR!
I BELIEVE THAT STRIKING DOWN YOUR ENEMY AT A DISTANCE IS THE SOUL OF A GUN.
...AND FROM THIS IT FOLLOWS THE WEAPON MUST HAVE LONG RANGE AND ACCURACY
MM. .TOO SHORT FOR A KIMONO'S OBI, TOO LONG TO SIMPLY TIE BACK THE SLEEVES. .YOUR ANSWERS ARE BOTH RIGHT AND WRONG!
LISTEN!!
A FIREARM IS A TOOL FOR KILLING!
IT HAS NO OTHER PURPOSE!

THIS BEING SO, THERE IS ONLY *ONE* CONCERN—HOW TO KILL THE *MOST* PEOPLE *MOST* EFFICIENTLY!
FROM THIS, ALL ELSE FOLLOWS— IT MUST BE EASY TO *CARRY!*
QUICK TO *LOAD* WITH POWDER AND BULLET!
POWERFUL ENOUGH TO FELL A FOE WITH A SINGLE SHOT!

OF COURSE, RANGE! OF COURSE, ACCURACY! YET IN THE FACE OF TEN ENEMIES, EVEN THE MOST POWERFUL AND ACCURATE MUSKET IS HELPLESS.
A GUN THAT CAN KILL TEN ENEMIES OR MORE AT ONE TIME! THAT IS THE HOLY GRAIL FOR ANY TRUE GUNSMITH!
LISTEN WELL! THE ERA OF WARFARE BETWEEN SWORD AND SPEAR IS OVER! IN THIS NEW AGE, THE NUMBER AND QUALITY OF GUNS WILL DECIDE THE OUTCOME! HOW CAN WE BUILD WEAPONS MORE POWERFUL THAN THOSE OF OUR ENEMY?! WITHOUT THAT DRIVE WITHOUT CEASELESS EXPERIMENTATION, YOU CAN NEVER BE A MASTER GUNSMITH!
YET WHAT DO WE SEE?!


BE IT OUR LEADER SHIBATSUJI RIEMON, OR HIS COUSIN CHŌZAEMON! EMOKIYA KANZAEMON, OR KYŪBHEI! KANSHICHI! THE FIVE GUNSMITHS, THE SUPPOSED MASTERS OF SAKAIZUTSU, HAVE FORGOTTEN THIS TRUTH, AND LEARNED ONLY PRIDE.
UNABLE TO CREATE NEW AND MORE POWERFUL WEAPONS, THEY TRY TO SAVE FACE WITH POINTLESS DECORATIONS! GOLD TRIM ON A GUN?! IVORY INLAYS?! FOOLS ALL!
TODAY A PLAIN IRON-BOUND MUSKET COSTS ONE HUNDRED SIXTY SILVER MONME! BUT A QUALITY ORNAMENTAL MUSKET, TWO HUNDRED EIGHTY IN GOLD!
SUCH PRICES ARE ABSURD! THEY'RE BASED ON LOOKS, NOT KILLING POWER! AND THE SHŌGUNATE, THOSE BENIGHTED IDIOTS, SNAP THEM UP BY THE DOZEN!

BUT THAT'S NOT ALL! NOW SHIBATSUJI AND THE REST CONSPIRE TO STEAL MY NEW MULTIPLE-FIRE MUSKET! THEY'RE DESPERATE FOR IT, PRAYING IT WILL SAVE THEIR MISERABLE REPUTATIONS!
BUT I WON'T COOPERATE! NOT WITH OUR LEADER SHIBATSUJI, OR ENOKIYA, OR ANY OF THEM! NOT UNTIL THEY CHANGE THEIR WAYS!
DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M SAYING?!
YYES, SIR!!

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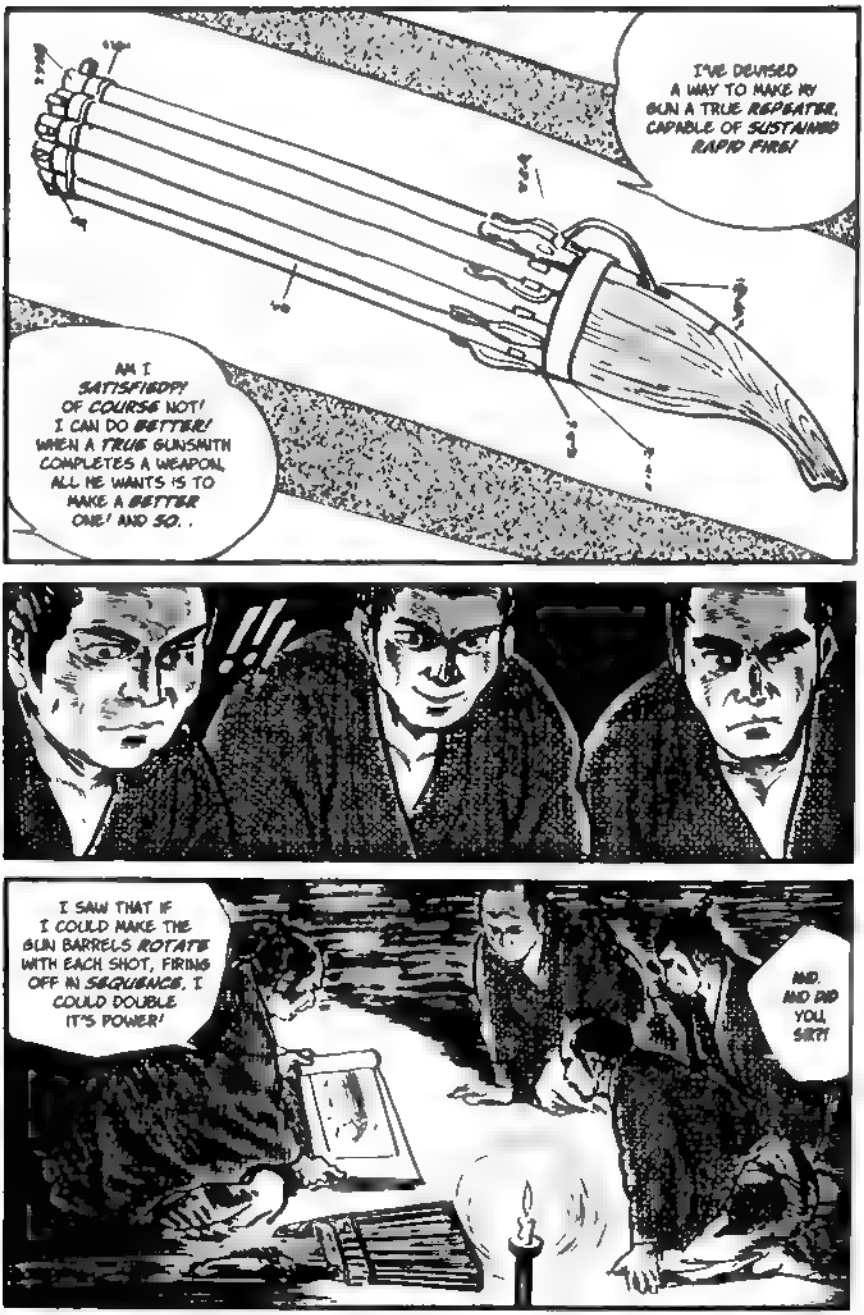
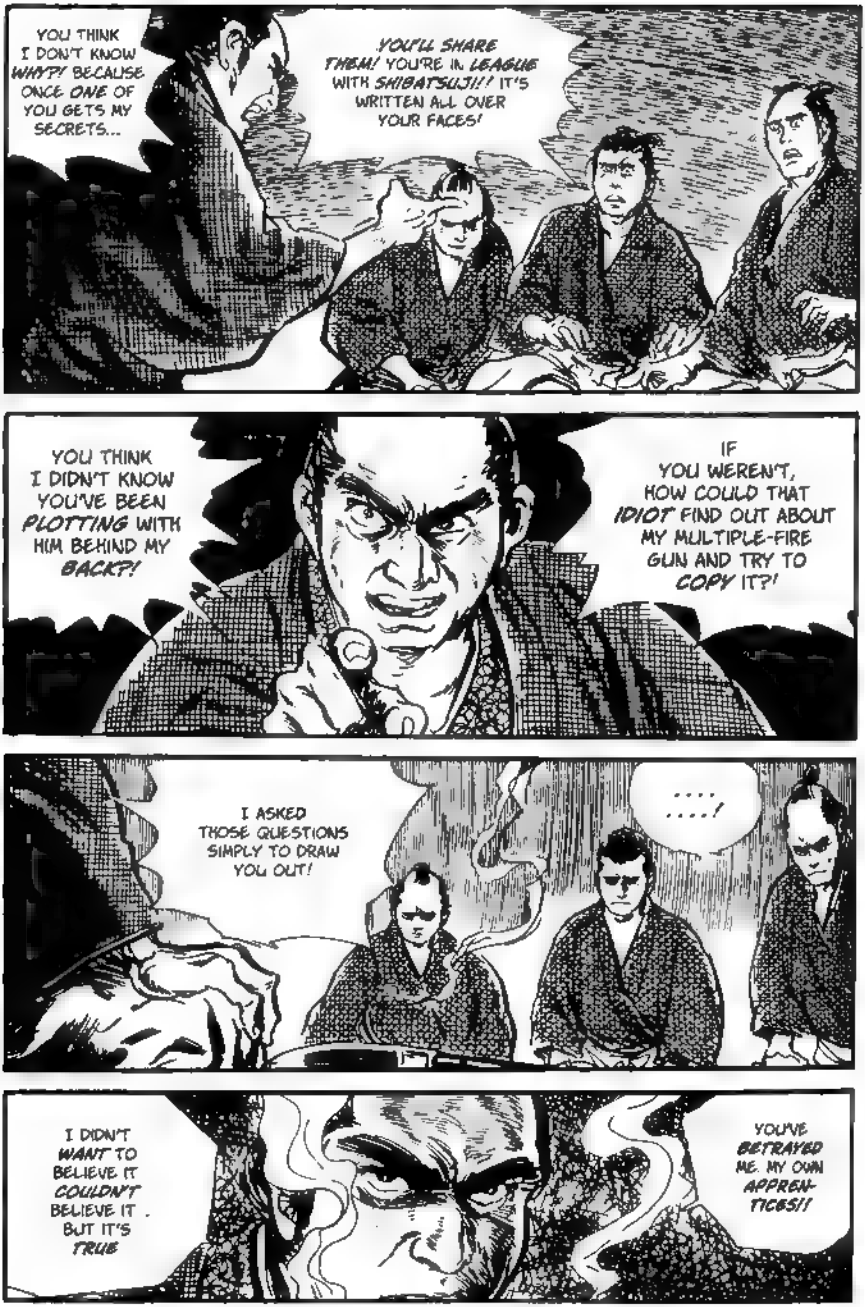
I HEAR SHIBA'SUJI TRIED TO MAKE A COPY OF MY NEW GUN THAT THE WEAPON BLEW UP, AND PEOPLE DIED!
HAH! OF COURSE HE CAN'T DO IT!
YOU CAN'T MAKE A NEW WEAPON OVERNIGHT! IT TAKES CEASELESS INNOVATION CONSTANT REFINEMENT!
I'VE DEVOTED THE LAST FOUR YEARS OF MY LIFE TO PERFECTING THIS GUN!
TWENTY IRON BARRELS BUNDLED THREE APIECE, FANNING OUT FROM THE MOUNT! PRECISELY MEASURED CHANNELS LEAD TO THE CHAMBER OF EACH BARREL DIRECTLY FROM THE FIRING PAN, SO ALL FIRE SIMULTANEOUSLY! FOUR YEARS TO MAKE IT WORK!
AND YET

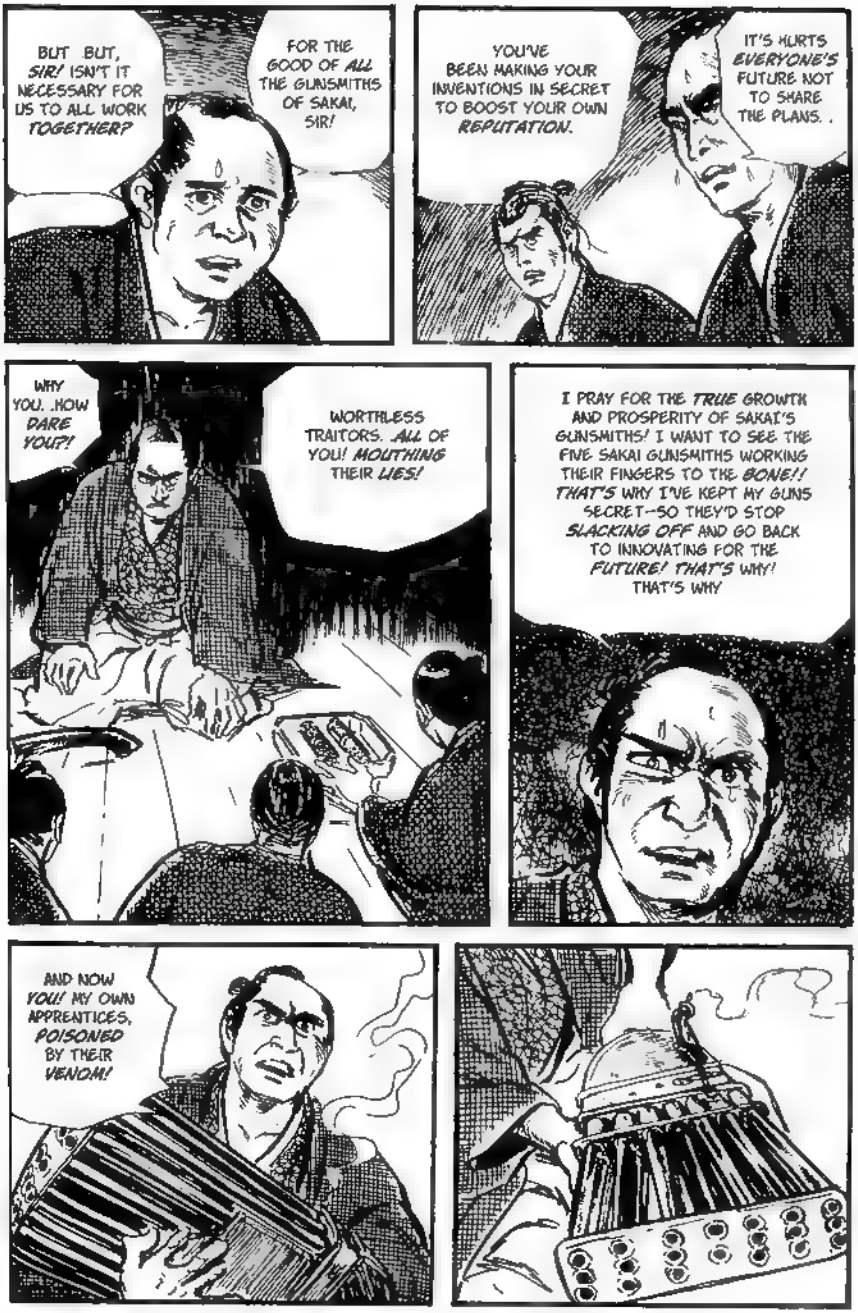

I'VE DEVISED A WAY TO MAKE MY GUN A TRUE *REPEATER*, CAPABLE OF *SUSTAINED RAPID FIRE!*
AM I *SATISFIED*? OF *COURSE* NOT! I CAN DO *BETTER!* WHEN A *TRUE* GUNSMITH COMPLETES A WEAPON, ALL HE WANTS IS TO MAKE A *BETTER* ONE! AND SO. .
!!!
I SAW THAT IF I COULD MAKE THE GUN BARRELS *ROTATE* WITH EACH SHOT, FIRING OFF IN *SEQUENCE*, I COULD DOUBLE IT'S POWER!
AND, AND DID YOU, SIR?!

YES. IT'S DONE.
I'VE COMPLETED IT ON MY OWN, UNKNOWN TO ALL OF YOU!
THOSE ARE THE PLANS.
TO ONE OF YOU, AND ONE ONLY, I BEQUEATH BOTH MY MULTIPLE-FIRE GUN AND MY REPEATING RIFLE.

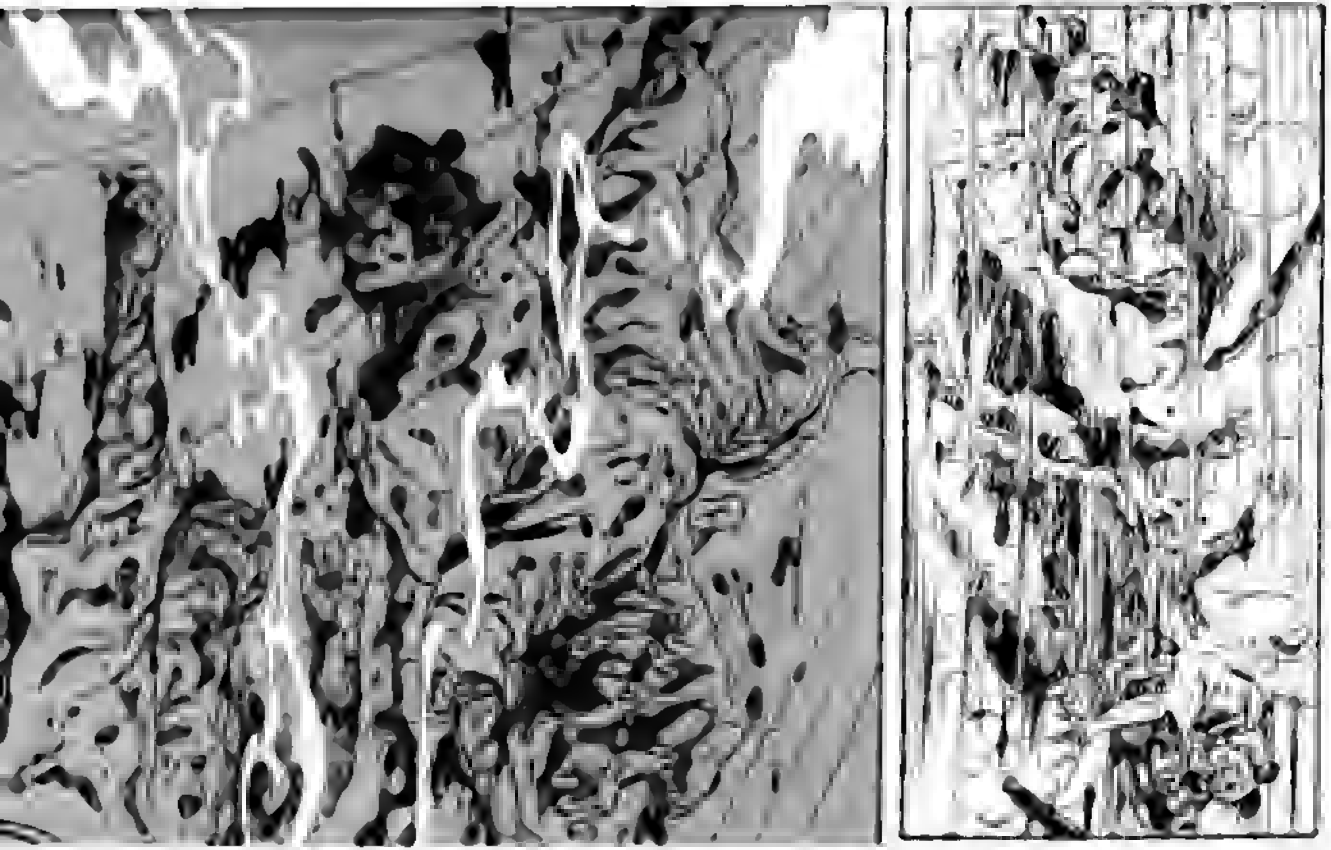
ENTARŌ! YOU'LL DO. YOUR ANSWER WAS CLOSEST TO MINE
TH-THANK YOU, SIR! THANK YOU!
NO COMPLAINTS ...?

N-NO, SIR. IT CAN'T BE HELPED..
OF COURSE WE'RE DISAPPOINTED, BUT..
YOU FOOLS!!
A REAL APPRENTICE WOULD BE STARVING FOR MY SECRETS, EVEN IF HE HAD TO KILL ME TO GET THEM!
AND YOU JUST SIT THERE AND LET SOMEONE ELSE TAKE THE PRIZE?!


YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW WHY?! BECAUSE ONCE ONE OF YOU GETS MY SECRETS...
YOU'LL SHARE THEM! YOU'RE IN LEAGUE WITH SHIBATSUJI!! IT'S WRITTEN ALL OVER YOUR FACES!
YOU THINK I DIDN'T KNOW YOU'VE BEEN PLOTTING WITH HIM BEHIND MY BACK?!
IF YOU WEREN'T, HOW COULD THAT IDIOT FIND OUT ABOUT MY MULTIPLE-FIRE GUN AND TRY TO COPY IT?!
I ASKED THOSE QUESTIONS SIMPLY TO DRAW YOU OUT!
....!
I DIDN'T WANT TO BELIEVE IT COULDN'T BELIEVE IT. BUT IT'S TRUE
YOU'VE BETRAYED ME. MY OWN APPRENTICES!!


BUT BUT, SIR! ISN'T IT NECESSARY FOR US TO ALL WORK TOGETHER?
FOR THE GOOD OF ALL THE GUNSMITHS OF SAKAI, SIR!
YOU'VE BEEN MAKING YOUR INVENTIONS IN SECRET TO BOOST YOUR OWN REPUTATION.
IT'S HURTS EVERYONE'S FUTURE NOT TO SHARE THE PLANS. .
WHY YOU. .HOW DARE YOU!?
WORTHLESS TRAITORS. ALL OF YOU! MOUTHING THEIR LIES!
I PRAY FOR THE TRUE GROWTH AND PROSPERITY OF SAKAI'S GUNSMITHS! I WANT TO SEE THE FIVE SAKAI GUNSMITHS WORKING THEIR FINGERS TO THE BONE!! THAT'S WHY I'VE KEPT MY GUNS SECRET--SO THEY'D STOP SLACKING OFF AND GO BACK TO INNOVATING FOR THE FUTURE! THAT'S WHY! THAT'S WHY
AND NOW YOU! MY OWN APPRENTICES, POISONED BY THEIR VENOM!

BKROOOM



IT'S OVER..
MY QUEST OF
THE GUN,
OVER.

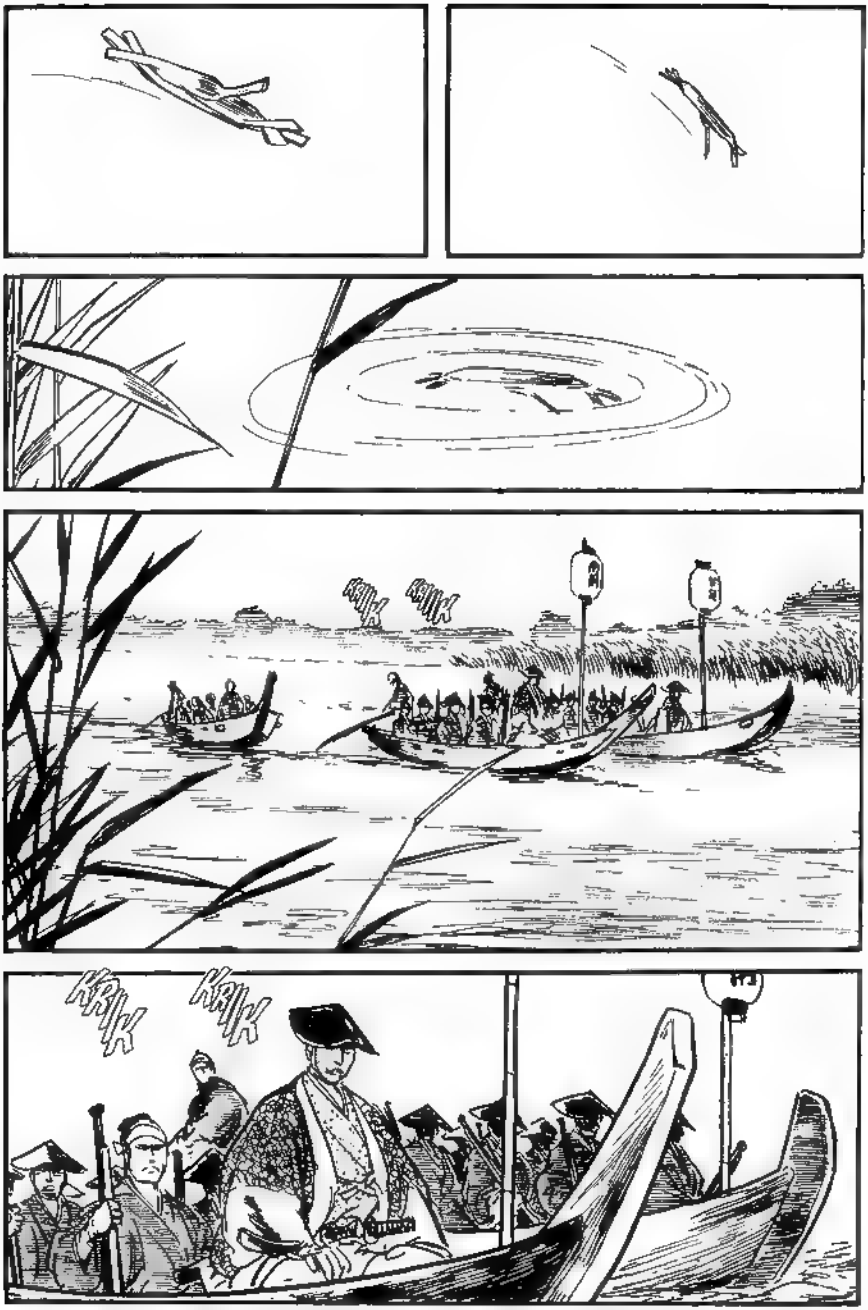
THE NATION IS AT PEACE, STRIFE FORGOTTEN. LUXURY AND PLEASURE RULE THE STREETS, AND OUR PEOPLE WALLOW IN DECADENCE! YET THE NANBAN BARBARIANS PRIME THEIR CANNON AND HUNGRILY EYE OUR LAND! THE FIRES OF WAR ALREADY FLICKER IN THE SOUTH!
IN TIMES SUCH AS THESE, THE TRUE WARRIOR GATHERS HIS ARMS AND HORSES, AND DOES NOT FORGET THE ARTS OF WAR! ONLY A FOOL WOULD JOIN HANDS WITH THE GUNSMITHS OF SAKAI AND HAVE ME KILLED FOR HIS OWN GAIN!
WEAPONS HAVE A LIFE OF THEIR OWN! MAKE ONE WEAPON, AND A SECOND APPEARS TO DEFEAT IT! A THIRD TO MAKE THAT SECOND ONE OBSOLETE! YET THEY SEEK TO SIMPLY STEAL MY DESIGNS AND COPY THEM!
THEY HASTEN THE DAY WHEN ALL ARE OBSOLETE, AND OUR NATION LIES UNDEFENDED!
THE CUTTING EDGE ISN'T THE WEAPON THE CUTTING EDGE IS SKILL, THE ENDLESS EFFORT OF THE INVENTOR!
IF THIS TRUTH IS FORGOTTEN, OUR LAND WILL LIE AS TANGLED AS GRASSES IN THE WIND, AND THE NATION WILL FALL!

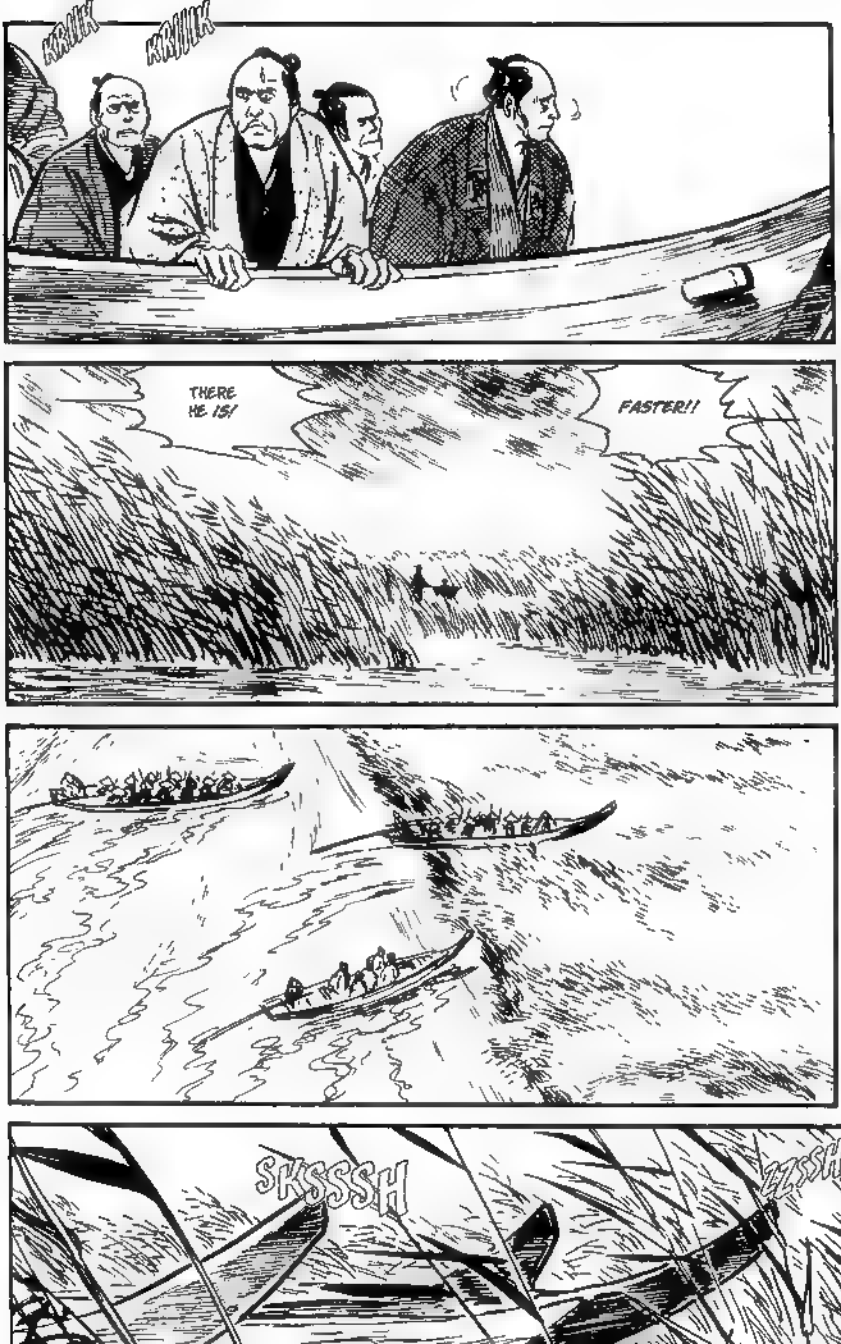
DO YOU UNDER-STAND?!
. . . . . .
THE WAY OF THE ASSAS-SIN HAS NO WORDS.
ONLY FANGS!
OUR GUESTS HAVE MUCH IN COMMON!
IN COMMON, YOU SAY?!
WE BOTH WALK THE PATH OF DEATH THE WAY OF THE ASSASSIN, THE WAY OF THE GUN THEY CROSS ON THE FIELD OF SLAUGHTER
YES! YES!! IT'S TRUE!
A REQUEST! WILL YOU HEAR ONE LAST REQUEST?!

SPEAK.
HERE.
....
....
BUILD THESE GUNS! USE THEM ON YOUR ASSASSIN'S ROAD!
TO WHAT END...?
IF YOU USE MY MULTIPLE-FIRE RIFLE, YOUR OPPONENTS WILL BE STRUCK DUMB WITH FEAR! AND THEN THEY'LL SEARCH FRANTICALLY FOR A WAY TO DEFEAT IT
ESPECIALLY THE GUNSMITHS OF SAKAI! THEY'LL LOSE ALL FACE! THEY'LL BE FORCED TO MOBILIZE AND CREATE NEW WEAPONS!

IT MAY BRING THEM BACK TO THEIR CALLING, THE ENDLESS INNOVATION OF THE TRUE GUNSMITH!
AND ONE THING MORE! WHEREVER MY MULTIPLE-FIRE RIFLE GOES, MY SPIRIT TRAVELS WITH IT! MY REDEMPTION!
I BEG YOU- GRANT MY REQUEST!

GRANTED !!
SKUSSH
SUCH JOY


KRIK
KRIK
KRIK
KRIK

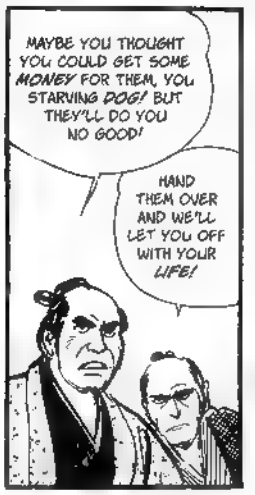

KRAK
KRAK
THERE HE IS!
FASTER!!
SKSSSH
ZZSSHH

HALT!!

I PERFORMED YOUR ASSASSINATION FOR YOU..
YES, I'VE SEEN YOUR WORK
BUT THE *MULTIPLE-FIRE RIFLE* AND THE *REPEATING RIFLE PLANS* WE WANTED ARE *GONE!*

WE SEARCHED EVERY *INCH* OF SHICHIRŌBEI'S WORKSHOP! THERE'S ONLY ONE OTHER PLACE THEY COULD BE. .

YOU HAVE THEM!


MAYBE YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD GET SOME *MONEY* FOR THEM, YOU STARVING *DOG!* BUT THEY'LL DO YOU NO GOOD!
HAND THEM OVER AND WE'LL LET YOU OFF WITH YOUR *LIFE!*

YOU ARE THE FIVE GUN-SMITHS OF SAKAI?!
S-SO WHAT IF WE *ARE*?!
SURRENDER THE PLANS, OR YOU'LL FEEL THE POWER OF OUR *SAKAIZUTSU* IN YOUR SHATTERED FLESH!!
IS *THAT* WHAT YOU WANT?!
"THE NATION IS AT PEACE, STRIFE *FORGOTTEN!* LUXURY AND *PLEASURE* RULE THE STREETS." YET THE FIVE GUNSMITHS OF SAKAI WALLOW IN *DECADENCE!*
W-WHAT?!
HEAR ME OUT!!
THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF SILENT SHICHIRŌBEI!

"THE NANBAN BARBARIANS PRIME THEIR CANNON AND HUNGRILY EYE OUR LAND! THE FIRES OF WAR FLICKER IN THE SOUTH!
"IN TIMES SUCH AS THESE, THE TRUE WARRIOR GATHERS HIS ARMS AND HORSES, AND DOES NOT FORGET THE ARTS OF WAR!
"ONLY A FOOL WOULD JOIN HANDS WITH THE GUNSMITHS OF SAKAI, AND HAVE ME KILLED FOR HIS OWN GAIN!"
WHY YOU—!!
HOW DARE A MERE ASSASSIN TALK BACK TO HIS EMPLOYER!
SILENCE!
THE WAY OF THE ASSASSIN DEMANDED THAT I KILL SHICHIROBEI AS ASKED.

...BUT YOU FLAUNT A MURDERED CORPSE AND SPIN A WEB OF LIES!
YOU'RE UNWORTHY OF MY SERVICE!
NO MORE QUES-TIONS!
KILL HIM AND TAKE THE PLANS!
R-READY! AIM—
FWSH
AHH?!

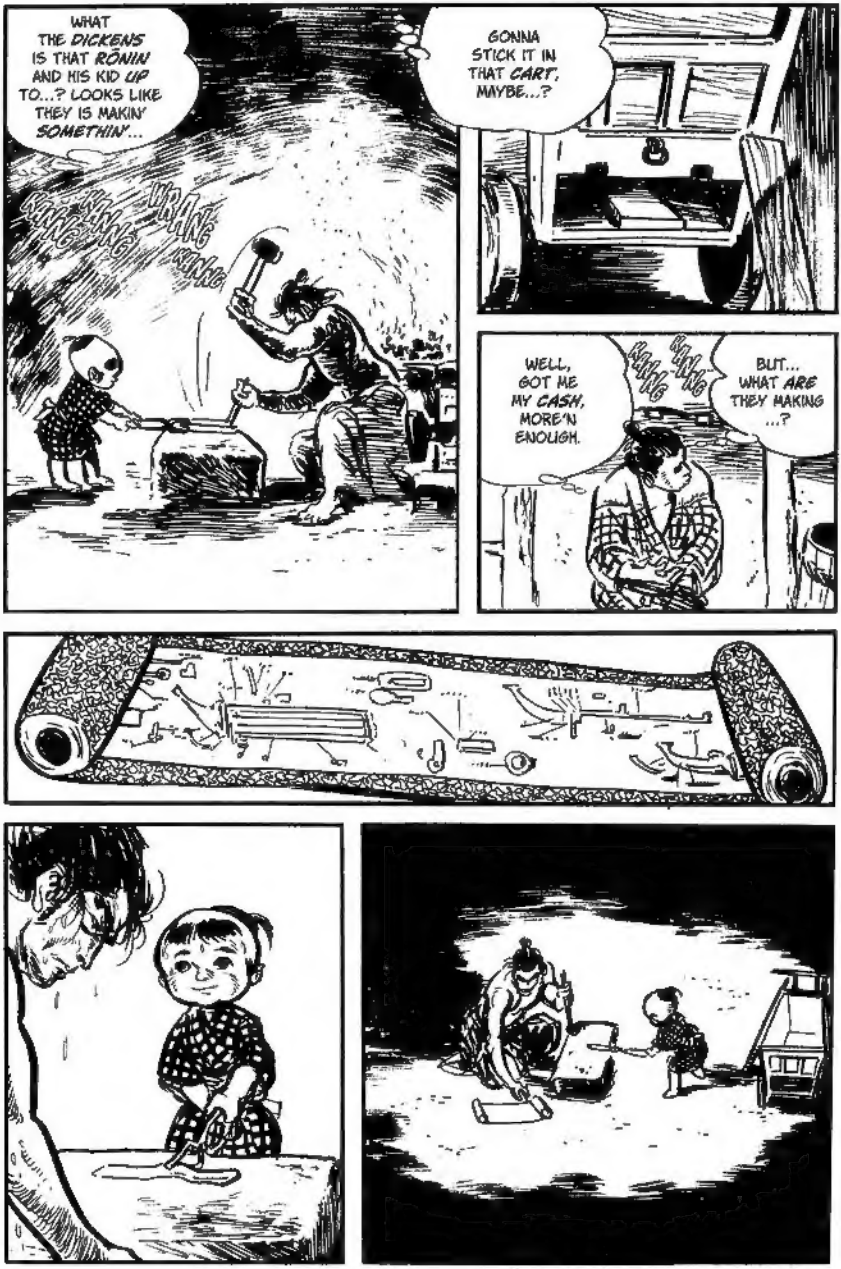
WHDD
BKOOM
BKOOM
BKOOM

SPAK
SPAK
SPANNG
KIANNG
BKKOOM
BKOOM
WHKROOM

LUGH
NNG
AAH!
AAAH!
SKSH

NO! DON'T!!
S-SPARE US!!
"WEAPONS HAVE A LIFE OF THEIR OWN!
"MAKE ONE WEAPON, AND A SECOND APPEARS TO DEFEAT IT! THEN A THIRD TO MAKE THAT SECOND ONE OBSOLETE!
"YET THE GUNSMITHS SEEK TO STEAL MY DESIGNS!
"THEY HASTEN THE DAY WHEN ALL ARE OBSOLETE, AND OUR NATION LIES UNDEFENDED!
"THE CUTTING EDGE ISN'T THE WEAPON THE CUTTING EDGE IS SKILL, THE ENDLESS EFFORT OF THE INVENTOR!"

I SPARE YOUR LIVES, AT SHICHIRŌBEI'S LAST REQUEST!
ENGRAVE HIS WORDS ON YOUR HEARTS!
KCHK
DAMN...PAYIN' ME TO USE THE FORGE, RIGHT THIS INSTANT!


WHAT THE DICKENS IS THAT RŌNIN AND HIS KID UP TO...? LOOKS LIKE THEY IS MAKIN' SOMETHIN'...
KANK KANK KANK
GONNA STICK IT IN THAT CART, MAYBE...?
WELL, GOT ME MY CASH, MORE'N ENOUGH.
KANK KANK KANK
BUT... WHAT ARE THEY MAKING ...?

LONE WOLF AND CUB BOOK FIVE: THE END
TO BE CONTINUED

GLOSSARY

ban
A local policeman, much like a sheriff.

Daikan
The primary local representative of the shogunate in territories outside of the capital of Edo.

daimyō
A feudal lord.

dōtanuki
A battle sword. Literally, "sword that cuts through torsos."

The Forty-Seven Ronin
In one of the most famous stories in Japanese history, forty-seven loyal retainers of a lord forced to kill himself because of the schemes of an enemy dedicated their lives to avenging him, before committing ritual suicide at his grave.

giyaman
From the Portuguese "diamante," or diamond, the tool used to make cut-glass containers.

han
A feudal domain.

jōdai
Castle warden. The ranking *han* official in charge of a *daimyō*'s castle when the *daimyō* was spending his obligatory years in Edo.

kōgi go-yō
The shogun's business.

kōgi kaishakunin
The shogun's own second, who performed executions ordered by the shogun.

machi-bugyō
The Edo city commissioner, combining the post of mayor and chief of police. A post held in monthly rotation by two senior Tokugawa vassals, in charge of administration, maintaining the peace, and enforcing the law in Edo. Their rule extended only to commoners.

meifumadō
The Buddhist Hell. The way of demons and damnation.

metsuke
Inspector. A post combining the functions of chief of police and chief intelligence officer.

nagamaki
A two-handed spear-like weapon taller than a man, with a short shaft and long, curved blade. Similar to the more common naginata, which had a longer shaft.

nanban
Westerners were known as "southern barbarians," after the first traders reaching Japan from the south. By the Edo period, Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch adventurers, traders, and missionaries were active across Asia.

o-niwaban
"One in the garden". A ninja. the secret agents of the Shōgunate, heard but never seen.

O-Sadamegaki
Short for Kujigata O-Sadamega. The concordance of shogunate laws, compiled in 1742.

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